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WITCHES  
&  
FISHES



ANGEL FISH

# WITCHES & FISHES

*By*

SIR HESKETH BELL

G.C.M.G.

*Illustrated by*

JOANNA DOWLING



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FOREIGN SYSTEMS OF COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION  
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GLIMPSES OF A GOVERNOR'S LIFE  
(Sampson, Low. 1946)

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## INTRODUCTION

WHEN war broke out I was spending happy days in retirement in the pleasant villa which I had built at Cannes a few years before. I remained on the Riviera until June, 1940, when the threat of invasion by the Italians made it advisable to quit while it was still possible to do so in reasonable comfort.

After more than forty years of almost continuous service in the Tropics I found that I could not stand the winter climate of the homeland and, as it was impossible to know how long the war would last, my thoughts reverted to the charming islands of the Bahamas where the climate is excellent and frosts are unknown.

I had served five years in that prosperous colony at the latter end of the last century and had retained very pleasant memories of the pretty little town of Nassau and of the placid and easy life that one could lead there. I therefore became a refugee like many other people who were too old to do any useful war work in England. It was my good fortune, in 1942, to find most comfortable quarters with very kind friends who had a charming house on the seashore on the outskirts of the town.

During my long association with the West Indian colonies I became much interested in the superstitions of the coloured people in those islands and especially in that class of witchcraft generally known locally as *Obeah*, or as *Voodoo* in the United States. I found many sources of direct information not usually possessed by transient visitors to the Caribbean Islands and I trust that the notes on that subject,



which may be read in the following pages, will interest those who read them.

In the course of the eight happy years that I spent, when administering the government of the charming island of Mauritius in the distant seas of the Indian Ocean, I had especially favourable opportunities for studying the "manners and customs" of many of the beautiful and wonderful fishes that haunt tropical waters.

I cannot, however, claim anything more than an amateur degree of scientific knowledge of biology relating to fishes, but I think I may fairly say that I am a keen and careful observer and that the notes which I made, on the spot and at the times of occurrence, may be accepted as correct. Some of them may cause surprise, if not incredulity, among those of my readers who have been accustomed to think of fish merely as edible and as rather stupid and uninteresting creatures. I have, however, become so much impressed by what I noted as to justify me in thinking that many fish possess a considerable degree of what may fairly be termed "intelligence."

It was therefore a great joy to me to find that I could continue my observations under almost equally favourable conditions in the waters of Nassau. The green lawn of the house in which I lived bordered on a strip of gleaming white sand that was bathed by the gentle wavelets of a sea of the most amazing blue. The colour of the Bahamian waters is, in fact, one of the most beautiful sights in the world and its tones vary in exquisite degrees between blue and green. I can only describe this colour as the bluest of greens and the greenest of blues.

With the kind permission of my hostess I soon set to work to construct on this lovely "coral strand" a sort of open-air aquarium. Its walls were of stone topped by timber and it enclosed a patch of water about fifteen feet by nine. Several wired openings in the wall, at low-water level, enabled the water to be kept in its natural condition by the rise and fall of the tides. At one end of the enclosure and overlooking it I built a small pavilion, thatched with the leaves of the coconut palm, from which we could get an excellent view of the behaviour of the denizens of the pool.

Many a delightful hour did I spend in my little Cabana, watching the antics of the many kinds of beautiful fish and jotting down the thoughts and recollections of bygone days that passed through my mind. The following pages contain many of those thoughts and reminiscences. I present them to my readers, hoping that they may, when glancing through them, find some interest and amusement.

HESKETH BELL.

*Nassau,*  
*Bahamas.*

1946.

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"Oh, de, only t'ing you can do is to go to another Obeah pusson and to make him give you a stronger medicine to spoil de work ob de other bottle."

"I suppose this costs you a lot of money?"

"Oh yes, Sah, plenty. Some people does pay as much as five dollars for a good strong spell."

And so, I gathered, the good work would proceed, spell and counter-spell, until one or both parties had no more money to spend with the sorcerers.

"And what about spirits that come in the night, Moses, or that meet you when you are walking alone? Do you believe in them?"

"Ob course I does, Sah," he said. "Dere is plenty and plenty ob dem. Dere is de Boomzewooms dat you see in de dark, hanging by their toes head downwards from de big branches ob de great silk-cotton trees. And den dere is de wicked Chicky-Charmers"—a delightful name, I thought—"who walk on their heads on de road on moonlight nights wid der foots in de air, turned wrong way round. Dey will chase you, calling out 'Hoo! Hoo!' Den you must run for you' life, because if dey catch you dey will bite you in de back ob you' neck, and you will never see anyt'ing again."

According to Moses, there seems to be no limit to the awful creatures of the night that might haunt you; and chief among them, I was interested to find, were "Hags" which, I found, were the counterparts of the *Loups-garous* of France, the Werewolves of the English countryside, and the *Vroudalachas* of Hungary. "And what are they?" I asked. And then he went on, with a wealth of unsavoury detail, to tell





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me that they were to be found in nearly every village; how they were usually very old men and women, well known for dealing in Obeah; how they had made pacts "wid de Debbil"; and how, by becoming invisible, they could slither through the keyhole in the door of a cottage and, finding you asleep, they would suck your blood, and only depart when they had got their fill.

"You knows, Sah," he continued, "how sometimes when you does wake up in de morning, you does feel so tired dat you t'ink you mus' have been working all de night. Well, Sah, dat mean dat a Hag mus' have been sucking you!" He went on to tell me about the process by which a Hag becomes invisible; and it seems that it is in the dead of night that the horrible creature will proceed to one of the great silk-cotton trees (*Bombax Ceiba*) which are often such magnificent features of a West Indian landscape, and which are usually known as Jumbie Trees. Jumbies and Duppies, by the way, are the usual West Indian names for ghosts, and I am reminded that in West Africa the great silk-cotton trees are always feared as being haunted by the spirits of the dead. Moses further informed me that the Vampire, on reaching the unhallowed spot, would divest itself of its skin and, having neatly folded it up and hidden it away, would then assume the shape of a black dog or a cat or a bat or perhaps some other creature usually connected with sorcery. He strongly advised me, if I should ever come across any hidden skin of a Hag, to carry it away with me, place it in a mortar, liberally sprinkle it with pepper, and pound it to rags. He assured me that, if that



was done, the Hag could never get back into its skin and at daylight would perish miserably.

"But surely, Moses," said I, "you don't believe all this nonsense?"

"Ah!" he exclaimed with some heat. "You white people, you is all de same. You no believe in nuttin'. But we black folk, we does *know*! Look, Massa! I tell you dis to make you believe. Dere is one old woman in dis village who eberyone knows is a witch and a Hag. One Joseph Solomon was always complaining dat he feeling weak and sick when he wake up in de marnin'. And he be sure that de Hag was working on him. So, one time, he get one ob his friends to keep watch all night wid a gun. And, sure enough, just before daybreak de man see a black rooster comin' out through de roof ob his little house. 'Bam! Bam!' de friend fire, and he see when de bird fly away dat he had shot it in de leg. Nex' marnin' he see de witch walkin' in de street, and, Massa, she was so lame dat she look just like she done broke her leg!" And old Moses looked at me triumphantly, evidently believing that he had given me proof positive of the horrible ways and means of Hags and witches.

"Is there any other way, Moses, of recognizing a Hag in the daytime?" I asked.

"Oh yes, Sah!" he said. "I 'member once, dat de same woman I just tell you 'bout, she come to my house some time ago, and she set down near me in a chair just like de one dat you is now settin' upon. When she not lookin' I stuck a pair ob scissors into de wood ob de seat just under her, and I said two words to myself. Massa, I can't tell you dem two





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words. Dey is secret. I knew dat she could not get away so long as de scissors stuck dere. I say nuttin' but I watch her all de time. Presently she begin to 'riggle on de chair and I knew dat she was beginning to feel de spell and dat she knew she could not get away. She stop dere, 'riggling and 'riggling and saying over and over again, 'And now I must go, and now I just be going.' But it no good. It was enough for me, and, presently, I softly take away de scissors. De moment I do so de woman jump up just like sometin' done bite her, and she run out ob my yard cussin' me and all my family."

Old Moses could have gone on telling me stories about Hags and witches all the afternoon, but I had another engagement and had to put off to another occasion hearing him tell about the horrible ways of those who dig up corpses in the cemeteries at night, in order to obtain ingredients for the most fearful of the spells which they are sometimes asked to prepare.

Old Moses' story about the West Indian vampires reminded me of the gruesome superstitions of a similar nature that are prevalent among the peasantry of many other parts of the world. In Hungary, for instance, the unsophisticated peasants are convinced of the existence of human vampires and that, by making a pact with the Powers of Darkness, it is possible to prolong life indefinitely. This is done by sucking the blood of unconscious human beings during the night. When the vampire apparently dies and is buried it is said to have the power of leaving its grave as soon as night falls and to enjoy all the pleasures of life. It is, however, obliged to return to its grave before daybreak. The people in Hungary

who are believed to possess this power exercise such a degree of fear over the village folk that the bodies of suspected ones are usually buried at cross roads with a stake thrust through the body.

This kind of superstition is, strange to say, to be found almost all over the world and not only among primitive people. In the country districts of France the human vampires are known as *Loups-garous* and the peasants are prone to believe that they are aged human beings who, having made a pact with the Devil, are able at night to assume the semblance of a wolf. They can at will become invisible. By a secret sort of suction they are able to feed on the blood of human beings during their sleep. During the day they resume their human shape, and such people are the ones who are generally credited with a knowledge of sorcery and other black arts. I have read that belief in vampirism is to be found among the people of such widely separated countries as China, Russia, Greenland, India and especially tropical Africa.

In the West Indies there are hosts of semi-educated coloured persons to be found who, in the depths of their hearts, firmly believe in the existence of vampires. In the English-speaking islands they are usually called Hags, and in the French islands they are known, by the *patois*-speaking people, either as *Ligarou*, which, of course, is a corruption of the French *Loup-garon*, or as *Seconyant*, which seems to me to have some connection with *Succubi*.

During my long experience of the West Indies I have often talked to the coloured folk about this superstition, and found that it varied only slightly among the Islands. It must, of course, have been

brought to the Colonies by the African slaves who were imported during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and by the French settlers in Guadeloupe and Martinique.

★ 2 ★

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THIS morning, while I was glancing through the diary that I kept in 1890, I came across the name of the more or less infamous Sir Roger Casement. He, as many of my readers may remember, died a traitor's death in the Tower of London during the first World War.

We were both on board ship, going back to our posts in West Africa after a spell of leave. He was then a man of about forty and of rather a handsome type. I found him very pleasant and his talk was full of interesting experiences in various parts of the world. In those days he showed none of those exaggerated ideas about Irish nationalism which developed, later on, to such insensate degrees and led to his tragic end. He had fine, large Irish eyes and wore a dark, closely clipped peaked beard which gave rather a Spanish cast to his face.

One afternoon, while we were sitting on the deck of the cranky old steamer that was taking us to the Gold Coast, we were talking, among other things, about African superstitions and especially about the

practice of "rain making." Praying for rain is a worldwide practice whatever be the religion or superstition of the people. Among the primitive natives of Africa prayers to a rain-god are especially prevalent and are considered the special duty of the Fetish priest or medicine-man. If prayers and incantations do not do the trick sacrifices to the spirits or idols will usually follow.

I remember being told by Sir Roger of an instance that he was connected with, when, in his early days, he was a Vice-Consul in that part of West Africa which is now a portion of Southern Nigeria, but which, in those days, was known as the Oil Rivers Protectorate. Before we definitely took over that part of the Gulf of Guinea and established our protectorate, our settlements in the vicinity of the mouths of the great Niger river were limited almost entirely to the seaboard. In most of those places we had small forts that would be able to defend the trading stations or "factories," as they were called, from any raids on the part of the native tribes occupying the hinterland. The chief and, in fact, almost the only trade carried on with the natives was for palm oil, derived from the great forests of palms which grow in great abundance in the vicinity of the Gulf of Guinea. The traders were, generally speaking, a very rough lot and were usually unkindly designated by the unflattering name of "P.O.R.s"—standing for "Palm Oil Ruffians." Their lives were hard and the death-rate terribly high, and it is not surprising that their manners and morals were often strange and primitive.

The palm oil trade was a profitable one. The natives

had little idea of the real value of money and were satisfied to barter their oil for inferior but gaudy cotton goods, gin, beads and other cheap rubbish at rates of exchange which left a great gain in the hands of the traders. Relations with them were usually friendly but, on occasions, quarrels would arise between the P.O.R.s and the Chiefs in the interior and if the differences were not peacefully settled to the satisfaction of the native potentates they would take their revenge by closing the trade and forbidding all intercourse between their people and the factories on the coast. These interruptions sometimes lasted a long time and caused great loss to the Europeans.

On one occasion, said Casement, a very powerful Chief, or "King," as they called them in West Africa, whose oil trade with the coast was very important, being greatly offended by some dispute, closed his branch of the Niger and all trade collapsed for some weeks. The matter became so serious that Casement, who was then in charge of that part of the territory, was directed to proceed to the interior and to try to pacify the irate monarch and to induce him to reopen his river.

The headquarters of this Chief were some days' trek from the coast, and Casement's journey, through dense forests and fetid jungle, took him several days. The natives had made no attempt to oppose his passage and Casement was informed that the King would receive him in a friendly manner. This was fortunate as Casement had no armed force with him. He knew that the success of his mission depended entirely on his making a friend of the King.

One afternoon, when the party had approached to



within a few miles of the native capital, Casement was disgusted to see, hanging to a tree in the vicinity of the track, the body of a woman. The arms and legs were stretched out crosswise and tied to branches. The unhappy creature was not dead but was moaning in agony. Casement was told that she had been put up there several days before and that she was intended as a sacrifice to bring rain, which was badly required. The woman was exposed to the blazing sun and had had neither food nor water. The horrid sight infuriated him and Casement ordered his men to cut the poor woman down. But the local natives, who were with him, urged him to stay his hand. They assured him that any interference with this sacrifice, which had been ordered by the King, would certainly result in the failure of his mission and would probably result in the murdering of the whole party. The people stated that there had been no rain for weeks and that the crops all over the country were being ruined. If no rain came soon there would certainly be a famine in the land and many thousands of people would die. Greatly against his inclinations Casement, with the poor woman's moans still in his ears, was forced to leave her there and to pursue his journey.

The following morning he and his party arrived at the King's Court and, after sundry formalities, were received by him. The Chieftain, who at first was inclined to be very truculent and unfriendly, became rather mollified by the rich presents which Casement had brought with him, and gradually became friendly and promised to see what could be done for the settlement of the dispute.

Casement then told the King that, if he wished to prove his friendship, he should grant him a favour. He told him how horrified he had been at the sight of the woman who was being crucified on the tree by the side of the road and begged that she should immediately be cut down. But the King at once resumed his unfriendly attitude and expressed great indignation at Casement's temerity in attempting to interfere with the dictates of the great Fetish under whose protection the country lay. There was nothing more to be done at the moment and, a good deal disquieted by the prospect of failure for his mission, he returned to the quarters which had been assigned to him.

The next morning one of his first acts was to enquire as to the condition of the unfortunate woman and he was told that, though evidently moribund, she was still alive. At ten o'clock he started to see the King in order to renew his request for the cessation of the sacrifice. He had hardly left his hut when he was told that it would be quite useless for him to proceed further as the woman had just died. Less than a quarter of an hour later the sky became greatly overcast and a torrential downpour of rain flooded the land!

In this instance the sacrifice "worked" and the news of its success would be spread far and wide throughout the land. No attention would be paid to the scores, if not hundreds, of cases where no rain had followed a sacrifice and it would only be another case of "counting the hits and not the misses."

Since Casement's time, of course, a very great measure of law and order has been established

throughout what used to be the Oil Rivers Protectorate, and the Colony of Lagos, with its churches and cinemas and colleges, which includes most of the territory where forty years ago human sacrifices and all sorts of barbarism flourished under the rule of Fetish, is now a very up-to-date place.

Sir Roger Casement certainly was an extraordinary man and his execution was a fitting end to his romantic and adventurous life. He was the first and, we must hope, will be the last Knight Commander of the most distinguished Order of St. Michael and St. George to die the death of a traitor on the most historic spot in the empire. He had many of the fine qualities of an Irishman but also some of the worst, and his rabid hatred of Britain, in spite of his having been for many years a trusted servant of the Crown, was so intense as to cause him to play for a long while the part of a treacherous rebel.

About two years later I was vividly reminded of Casement's story. I was then occupying the post of Chief Assistant Treasurer of the Gold Coast, but the Governor of the Colony, Sir Brandford Griffith, frequently selected me for duties that had nothing to do with my substantive post. On this occasion he appointed me to go on a mission to the very place in which the incident related by Casement took place.

The King of Benin was again giving trouble and was attacking several friendly tribes, and it had become essential that he should be brought to book. I had made practically all my preparations and was about to proceed to Lagos by ship, when the Governor changed his plans and decided to send Mr. Phillips, who was the sheriff of the Colony.

Phillips was accompanied by two other officials and Captain Boisragon, of the Hausa Constabulary, who was to be in charge of the small police escort. Phillips' object was to try to persuade the King to behave himself and the mission was to be, of course, an entirely peaceful one.

Three days after Phillips had left the coasts and had entered the Benin territory, the small party was suddenly ambushed by a large number of natives. Almost the whole of the escort was butchered and Phillips, together with one of the surviving officers, was captured and carried off to Benin town. The King refused to see them and ordered their execution. We subsequently heard that the two unfortunate officers suffered unspeakable tortures in the marketplace before they were finally put to death. It had been a narrow escape for me as, if the Governor had not changed his mind, I might very likely have suffered the terrible fate that befell poor Phillips and his companion. An important punitive expedition was speedily dispatched against Benin, and suitable punishment was meted out to the treacherous King and his barbarous people.

Captain Boisragon and one other officer managed to escape the fate of the ambushed escort by plunging into the dense forests that encompassed the track. For six days they broke their way through masses of tangled vines and prickly undergrowth, with nothing to eat except a few berries and roots which appeared to be edible. They finally reached Lagos in a deplorable condition.

Strange to say, at the very time that Boisragon was fighting his way through the dense African bush, his

sister was having almost exactly the same experience about 7,000 miles away. She was Mrs. Grimwood, of Manipur fame. Her husband, I think, had been Resident in that distant and unsettled part of further India and had had great difficulties with the ruling Prince. The climax came when the Rajah's son, who was in open revolt, captured and decapitated him. His unfortunate wife only escaped the amorous intentions of the Prince by fleeing by night into the dense forests. I remember hearing that she was almost completely unattended, and only had the garments that she was standing in when she rushed from her house. For many days she tramped through the jungle, half dead from lack of food and exposure, and it was in a miserable plight that she finally reached safety. A great deal of publicity was given to Mrs. Grimwood's adventures, and on her return to England she was specially honoured by Queen Victoria.

★ 3 ★

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I AM taking my seat in the cabana this afternoon rather later than usual, and the sun is slanting low over the coconut palms gilding their long, drooping leaves.

As I sit here, watching the antics of the fish in my aquarium, one of the chief impressions I get is their

*joie de vivre*. The great majority of them are full of life and seem to delight in swimming rapidly about the pool, darting here and there and sometimes evidently playing at some sort of game with others.

A fortnight ago there was a serious catastrophe in the aquarium. A storm, accompanied by abnormally high tides, broke open one of the chief openings into the enclosure and there was a great exodus of my fish. It was a serious loss, as many of them had been under my observation for several months. At one time or another more than forty different specimens have been through the aquarium and I, fortunately, possess a large number of notes about their behaviour and peculiarities.

Strange to say three of the largest of my fish, although the exit was wide open for several hours, had elected to remain in the quarters which they apparently found comfortable, and where they get ample and regular meals. One of them is a grouper, though a shy creature usually lurking in a hiding-place, has been my boarder for more than eighteen months. Luckily a fisherman whose small craft almost daily passes not far from the aquarium on its way to market, has been gradually replacing my stock since the disaster. Yesterday he brought me several good fish that I have not yet got. One of them is a fine specimen of sucker fish—a very peculiar creature, another is a magnificent blue fish that is now trying to hide among the coloured corals and sea fans at the opposite end of the pool, and a couple of others, a mutton fish and a porgy, which are still too shy to show themselves frequently. The white sandy bottom of the pool is also ornamented by

three fine specimens of star fish of bright red colouring. A small coconut palm stands on a pedestal in the centre of the aquarium and its gold and green leaves, drooping over the water, throw a pleasant degree of shade over the surface beneath.

The rapidity with which sea fish become bold and tame is remarkable. After three or four days in the pool most of them seem to realize that human beings do them no harm, and if I put my feet in the water, several of them at once come up and play about my ankles. Although some of them are well provided with very sharp teeth, not one of them has so far attempted to bite me when I put my hand in the water. I am indeed much impressed by the extreme gentleness and good manners of most of the fish that have passed through my pool. Most people seem to have an idea that fish lead rather tragic lives, and that the smaller ones spend most of their time in trying to avoid the jaws of the bigger ones. That is so, of course, to a great degree, but it is, I think, generally accepted that the vast majority of fish do not live by eating each other but feed mainly on sea-weed, small crustaceans, and that marvellous agglomeration of almost invisible organisms which permeate the oceans and are scientifically termed *Plankton*. I believe I am correct in saying that carnivorous fish, such as shark, barracouta and other well-known predatory fish number only a small percentage of the piscine world. They are like the lions, tigers, leopards and other great carnivora of the jungle, while the vast majority of other fish may be likened to the antelopes, gazelles, the rabbits and other more or less gentle creatures which are strict vegetarians.

I have never once seen a fight between the fish in my aquarium, not even between those which are powerfully built and possess formidable teeth. I have sometimes noticed one of them make a vicious dart at another as if to bite it, but have never actually seen a wound inflicted, and most of the fish in my pool seem to live in complete harmony. In most cases they appear to take no notice of each other. This happy harmony must, of course, be largely due to the fact that my fish are well and regularly fed, and it is very possible that, if they were left for some time without food, their behaviour would be less admirable.

Be that as it may, I can assert that as regards table manners most of my fish are models. Dogs and cats and other domestic animals and birds will usually fight with each other for the possession of attractive food, but I cannot remember ever noticing such behaviour among my fish. When small pieces of conch meat are thrown into the pool, the fish nearest to a morsel darts towards it and, if successful, is usually allowed to consume it in peace. Only once, in the course of many months, have I seen a large fish pounce on a small one and devour it.

Judging by my observations it seems to me that fish appear to have some sense of time and to show a marked degree of method in their movements and conduct. My visits to my aquarium are fairly regular, both in the mornings and the afternoons, and I am almost certain to find a number of the fish already congregated in the vicinity of the place from which I always feed them. I have often wondered by what means the fish could know the time at which my arrival could be expected. My fisherman tells me



that, in the island from which he hails, the fishing boats, returning to the village with their daily catch, all congregate at the same spot on the shore. He says that during twenty-three hours out of the twenty-four it is rare indeed to see the sign of a shark in those waters. But as soon as the usual time approaches for the arrival of the boats, numbers of the monsters appear and boldly feed on the entrails and other remains of the fish which have been cleaned, on the bay side, by the housewives of the village.

In support of this possibility that fish possess a sense of time I may add that, when I was in Bermuda lately, the wife of the Admiral in command told me that she used to throw regularly each morning at about the same hour bread or other food into the sea at the foot of her garden. She very soon found that numbers of fish of various kinds soon became aware of this fact and came to that spot waiting for the food. They were very rarely seen at other times of the day.

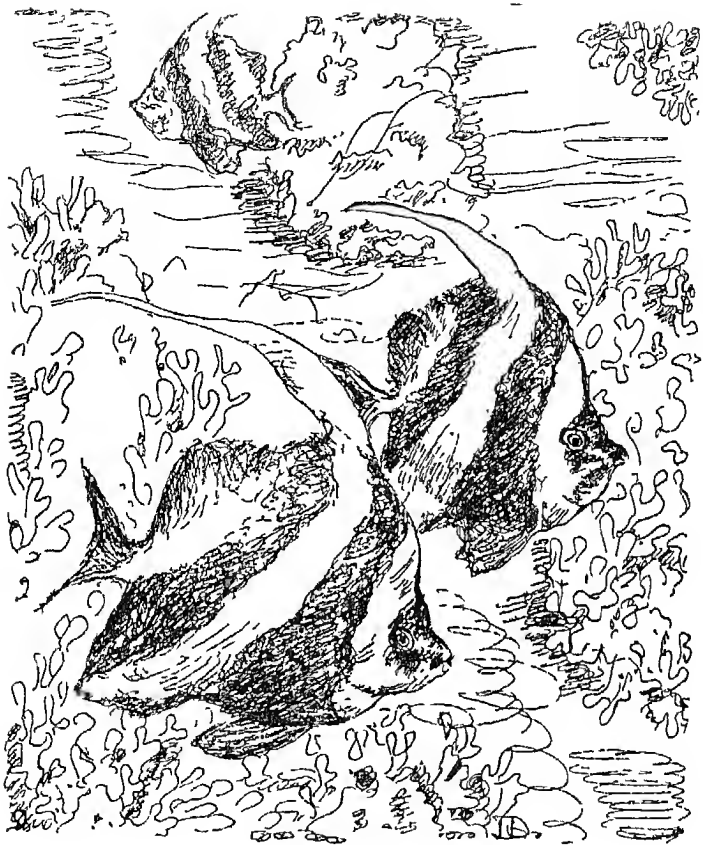
Another remarkable fact that I have noticed is the great rapidity with which the fish in my aquarium recover from wounds that may have been inflicted on them. Two of the larger fish recently were brought to me in a bad state through having been struck by a spear or other sharp weapon. The wounds were so severe that I expected the fish soon to die. To my surprise, however, the injuries after two or three days showed signs of rapid healing and at the end of a couple of weeks all outward signs of the injuries had practically disappeared, leaving the fish capable of all normal movements. In that admirable book, *Biology for Every-man*, by Sir Arthur Thompson, it is stated that sea-fish are remarkably free from disease

of any kind. I believe I am correct in saying that seawater usually contains a notable proportion of iodine, and I am wondering whether it is this constituent which may be the cause of the healthiness of fish and of the remarkable rapidity of recovery from wounds that I have noticed.

Among my fish by far the most beautiful are the lovely varieties which are generally known as angel fish. Many kinds of them are to be found in the waters around these islands, and I know of no more delightful spectacle than the sight of these lovely little creatures playing around the radiantly coloured sea fans and branching corals that grace the sea floor of gleaming white sand. The butterflies and birds of paradise of the far-eastern jungles are certainly of exquisite colouring, but their brilliancy is almost pale in comparison with the gorgeous tones and iridescent beauties displayed by our angel fish as they dart about in joyous exuberance of life.

Certainly the most beautiful of all the fish that I have had under my observation here is one of these angel fish. It is of turbot shape and would be described by scientists as a "compressed fish." The lower part of its body is of iridescent gold, while the upper part is of the brightest cerulean blue. The posterior fins, which are also blue, are lengthened into delicate streamers contributing greatly to the graceful movements of this fish. The one now in my pool is such a beauty that I have dubbed it the "Archangel." It moves about in such graceful evolutions and, apparently, so joyously that I am tempted to consider it as an incarnation of happiness.

Though less spectacular than the Archangel, there



are in my pool several smaller but also very beautiful varieties of other angel fish. Unlike the other occupants of the pool, most of them are gregarious and are nearly always found playing together in small groups. The local fishermen usually call them butter-

fly fish. The name is an appropriate one, as they usually are to be seen flitting and darting about in play. The commonest of them is often called "Four Eyes." This is on account of a large dark-coloured spot, very much like an eye, near each side of the tail. I think this is a kind of permanent camouflage, and is probably intended to puzzle any predatory fish that may pursue them. The position of these two imitation eyes near the tail may make it difficult for the enemy to know which end it should attack.

★ 4 ★

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THERE was an old negro working in the garden here this morning. He must have been well over 70 years of age, judging by the snow-white wool that covered his head, and he told me that his father had come from Africa in the old days as a slave. I noticed that he wore a piece of string on his left wrist on which was strung a strange sort of coloured bead. I asked him where it came from. "Dat one Africa bead, Sah," he said. "My mammy give it to me long, long time ago. It keep off de witches."

A closer inspection of the bead at once brought some interesting facts connected with beads back to my memory. When I was on the Gold Coast in the early 'nineties, the great majority of the natives were

very unsophisticated and beads were in great favour as ornaments. Most of them were of German or Austrian manufacture and were very cheap. But I was shown a kind which on the contrary was very highly prized. So valuable indeed were they considered, that they were usually exchanged for their weight in gold. They were known as Aggrey beads, and I was told that they were very rare and were generally found in small quantities, usually in a circle and two or three feet underground. The natives believe that they were the vertebrae of sacred serpents and declared that their presence was usually indicated by a spiral of vapour hovering over the spot in which they lay. So eager were the natives to obtain beads of this kind that the German manufacturers turned out various imitations of them. They were difficult to copy because various colours ran through them. Most of them were not round but were cylindrical in shape and looked rather like varieties of the common "lollipop" of our childhood's days. The natives, however, were experts as to these beads and readily spotted the counterfeits.

With a good deal of difficulty I managed to obtain three specimens of the real ones. And when I returned to London I showed them to Andrew Lang, the well-known author, who was a friend of mine. As soon as he saw them and heard that they had come from the Gold Coast he was greatly interested and said:—

"These beads, my dear man, are, I am almost sure, of ancient Phoenician fabrication and are thus a very interesting proof of the existence in ancient days of a constant traffic between Phoenicia and West Africa,

either by sea or, more likely, by an overland caravan route through Central Africa."

After lunch he took me to the British Museum and in the department devoted to the antiquities of the Middle East he showed me, in a case containing ancient objects of Phoenician manufacture, a number of beads that closely resembled those which I had obtained on the Gold Coast. Lang explained that the beads found by the natives, being always found in small accumulations underground, were doubtless the remains of necklaces worn by people who had been buried many centuries, and perhaps thousands of years, ago.

This was not the only interesting thing that Lang showed me in the great museum that afternoon. In another showcase, not far from the Phoenician exhibits, he showed me among antiquities of ancient Greece a small statuette of fine workmanship. It represented an old woman, in Greek draperies, in the act of washing the face of a small boy who was bent over a large tub. The moment I saw it, I exclaimed, "But it's 'You Dirty Boy'!"

The resemblance to the amusing and widely-spread advertisement of Pears' Soap which appeared on countless walls all over England many years ago was astounding. The attitude of the old woman was exactly the same and even the urchin's long arms were pendant over the tub.

Andrew Lang then told me that this little statuette had been unearthed among some ruins in Greece only a few years ago and was undoubtedly of very ancient origin. The statuette "You Dirty Boy" had been executed by an Italian artist—Louis Falero, I

think—some twenty years *before* the unearthing of the Greek statuette. It was therefore impossible for him to have got the notion of it from the work of the Greek artist. A strange instance of the same idea occurring to two men after an immense lapse of years.

★ 5 ★

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A FRIEND, of the female persuasion, has just left me after favouring me with a long dissertation on the misdeeds of her coloured servants. I cannot say that I was very sympathetic as I personally, during my long sojourns in Africa and the West Indies, have on the whole been very lucky with my coloured domestics. They have usually been good and trustworthy, but I am bound to say that there have been exceptions, notably in the case of chauffeurs of various hues whom it has been my lot here to sit behind. The first was constantly getting drunk; the second wore my shirts and socks; the third took the change out of a cheque with which to have a little gamble, and lost it on the way home; while the fourth used two gallons of my precious "gas" in taking a party of his friends for a long drive in my car. This reminds me of an amusing story told me by a friend who had spent many years in Malaya.

One day, summoning his Chinese butler, he told

him that he was shortly to be rejoined by his wife, who was coming from England. The man received the news with true Oriental impassiveness, but next day came to his master and announced that: He was "velly solly," but that he must give notice to leave.

"I know why you are doing this," said the Englishman, "and I think you are a silly fool. You have been with me for eleven years and I have treated you very well. I have never cuffed you or kicked you, as anyone else would have done, more than you deserved. I know why you want to go: it's because my wife is coming out. She is a very kind, gentle lady and, I am sure, will not upset your work in any way. Her coming will make no difference whatever to you."

"Yes," answered the man. "P'laps dat quite true. You been welly good master to me. You no kickee me too much, you no cuffee me too much, but, you see Master, every time Master kickee me I put down '1 pound butter' in the house-keeping book! If Missy come I no able to do dat!"

One of the very best servants that I ever had was the butler at Government House in Northern Nigeria. He was extremely black, about twenty-five years old, and rejoiced in the name of "Scabreeze." He was a native of Lagos and had had a smattering of education at a mission school. He could lay a table for a dinner party as well as any butler in London, and could even write a menu after a fashion. His spelling, however, was rather weird. He would insist on writing "cut legs" and "omlegs" and on one occasion we were invited to partake of "Blu Mange," which, I suppose, was intended to describe blanc-mange.



Seabreeze had once had a front tooth knocked out and on great occasions he sported in its place an artificial one made of bright yellow gold. It clipped on to the two neighbouring teeth by golden hooks and, he informed me, had been made by a village blacksmith.

In those days our servants in Nigeria wished to be paid only a small weekly food allowance, leaving the bulk of their wages to be paid to them in a lump when we went home on leave. This meant that on our departure our "boys" would find themselves in possession of a substantial sum which, during our absence in England, they would spend either in riotous living or in some other way. On one occasion when I was about to go on leave I asked Seabreeze, who had about £60 due to him, what he proposed to do with the money. He told me that he had a friend, a Yoruba man, who was about to go to a distant district to trade with the people there, who were very wild and primitive. This man said he was taking with him a good stock of gaily coloured cloths, beads, and other trifles, and reckoned to treble or quadruple his investment. He had told Seabreeze that if he would let him have his £60 he would share the profits with him.

When I returned to Zunguru about six months later, I missed the cheery-faced butler and enquired why he had not returned to Government House. I was told the following story. That Seabreeze had, as arranged, gone with his partner to a remote district, and that the man had suddenly abandoned him, taking with him the whole of their gains. Seabreeze, after a long and fruitless search for the thief, had

resolved to be avenged on him in true African fashion. He shut himself up in a hut made of dried reeds, set light to it and burned himself to death. Seabreeze, the almost perfect butler, who had lived for many years in close contact with Europeans, firmly believed that, by enduring such a terrible death, his spirit would pursue constantly his criminal partner and would make life unendurable for him.

There is no doubt that the natives of West Africa in particular are entirely convinced of the existence of a world of spirits which surrounds them night and day, and they cannot understand how we can deny such a fact. I am told that they believe in a sort of dual personality, composed of a soul which, on the Gold Coast, is known as the "*Kla*"—a word which, by the way, is interesting by being reminiscent of the ancient Egyptian "*Ka*"—the term for soul—and of a more or less malevolent entity which worries the enemies made during life. I remember that often when I was in Ashanti I would notice in the native courtyards carved wooden stools lying on their sides instead of upright. On my asking why this was so, I was assured that spirits, passing by, finding an unoccupied stool standing in its proper position, would sit upon it. If anyone then took his place on the seat, he would, by sitting upon him, thereby greatly annoy the spirit and incur a displeasure which would be vented upon him in many unpleasant ways.

The primitive races of the world are, of course, far from being the only strong believers in ghosts and an amusing story comes to my mind, told by that charming and inimitable writer, Elizabeth Russell, the author of *Elizabeth and her German Garden*, who

was a great friend of mine. She was one of the wittiest women that I have ever met. On this occasion a little party of us were sitting, after dinner, in the charming garden at her villa near Cannes. It was one of those wonderful moonlight nights one so often gets on the Riviera, and we had been talking about ghosts.

"A friend of mine," said Elizabeth, "once had a fearsome experience with ghosts. She was staying in an ancient country house which was known to be haunted by the most terrible apparitions, but, being a very strong-minded woman and proof against psychic demonstrations, insisted on being allowed to sleep in the room in which, it was said, a terrible murder had once been committed.

"She went calmly to sleep, but in the middle of the night she was awakened by the sheet being torn off her bed. Horrible green faces with flaming eyes gibbered at her from each corner of the room to an accompaniment of blood-curdling sounds. She was so terrified that she leapt out of her bed and, taking refuge in her bathroom, double-locked the door. She remained in that cold seclusion until the dawn of day when, summoning up all her courage, she re-entered the room. Everything was in perfect order, but her wig, which was reposing on the dressing-table, had turned snow-white!"



[To face page 42]



AS my fish have lately done nothing worth while recording I am going to spend the next hour or so in reminiscing about my favourite subject of "Obeah."

Those who have read as far as this in this book, will probably have gained the impression that I have long been interested in West Indian superstitions and that I therefore know a good deal about them. I had specially favourable opportunities of enquiring into the subject as, in the early days of my official career in the colonial service, I spent a considerable number of years in some of the Caribbean islands, where superstition among the uneducated coloured inhabitants is rife. Those notions for the most part are of African origin and many of them, as I have said before, survive to the present day.

The scope of my enquiry may be judged from the fact that as far back as 1889 I wrote a book entitled *Obeah; Witchcraft in the West Indies*, which was published in London by Sampson, Low, Marston & Co. A second and enlarged edition appeared in 1893. The subject evidently interested the public to some extent, as the *St. James's Gazette*, which was then a great London weekly, did it the honour of giving it two whole pages of review under the heading "A Book of the Week." Copies of both editions are, I believe, now very rare. I have, however, found one in the Nassau Library, hidden away among a lot of musty old books, and I am tempted to rescue from

oblivion some of the bits which, I think, may specially interest my readers.

In the first chapter I gave the following sketch of the origin of the term "Obeah." . . . "The term 'Obeah' is said to be derived from the substantive 'Obi,' a word often used in some parts of the east coast of Africa to denote witchcraft, sorcery and fetishism in general. The etymology of Obi has been traced to a very ancient source stretching far back into Egyptian mythology. A serpent, in the Egyptian sacred language, was called 'Ob' or 'Aub' or 'Obion.' It is, I believe, still the Egyptian name for a serpent. Moses, in the name of God, forbade the Israelites ever to enquire of the demon 'Ob,' which is translated in our Bible: charmer or wizard, divinator or sorcerer. The Witch of Endor is called 'Aub' or 'Ob,' translated Pythonissa, and 'Aubois' was the name of the Basilisk or Royal Serpent, emblem of the sun and an ancient oracle."

It is probable that the word "Ob" was carried across from the east to the west coast of Africa and thence to the West Indies, through the slaves, thus becoming the modern word Obeah. A point of much interest in this connection is that, when an Obeahman places a spell on a banana field to protect it from thieves, he claims to have let loose in it a number of magic serpents which would slay any marauder.

In my early days in Grenada my chief friend was an old Roman Catholic priest who had lived a long time in my district and had acquired a great fund of the local folklore. He knew a great deal about the practices of Obeah and said that it was one of the greatest obstacles that he had to contend with in his

work among his parishioners. He told me one day how, when he was riding along a country road, he noticed a small crowd of coloured folk congregated in front of a little wooden hut, before which a number of people were gathered, all talking together and evidently much exercised in their minds about something inexplicable. On asking what was the matter he was told that the owner of the house was lying dead and that he was an Obeahman, who had lived quite alone in that place for many years, and that there was consequently no one willing to undertake the job of looking after the corpse and burying it. In fact, no one would go inside the hut at all, as it was affirmed that his Satanic Majesty was there in person looking after the body of the sorcerer, which now undoubtedly belonged to him. To allay their alarm the priest got off his horse, and with the assistance of a couple of men broke open the door and entered the hut.

Lying on a wooden stretcher was the body of the unfortunate individual whose death must have occurred a good many hours before, and the body was in urgent need of burial. So after scolding the people for their cowardice my friend prevailed on them to see about a coffin and other details as quickly as possible. It was, however, in evident fear and trembling that any of them would enter the room, and the slightest noise would make them start and look towards the door in the expectation of seeing the Devil himself coming to claim his property.

The dirty little room was littered with the Obeahman's stock-in-trade. A number of vials containing some sort of unholy liquor were lying ready to be handed over to some foolish negro in exchange for



their weight in silver. In every corner were found the implements of his trade: rags, feathers, bones of cats, parrot beaks, dogs' teeth, broken bottles, grave dirt, rum and eggshells. Examining further, they found under the bed a large pot containing a great number of round balls of red earth of various dimensions, whitened on the outside and fearfully and wonderfully compounded. Some seemed to contain hair and rags and were strongly bound with twine; others were made of skulls of cats, stuck round with human or dogs' teeth and glass beads. There were also a lot of eggshells and numbers of little bags filled with an assortment of rubbish. In a little tin canister was found the most valuable of the sorcerer's stock, namely, seven bones belonging to a rattlesnake's tail. These, the people said, sell for five dollars each, so highly valued are they as amulets and charms.

Rummaging further, they pulled out from under the thatch of the roof an old salmon tin, the contents of which showed how profitable was the trade of the Obeahman. It was stuffed full of five-dollar banknotes, besides a number of handsome twenty-dollar gold pieces which were then current in the island. The priest said that he finally ordered the people to gather up all the rubbish, which was soon kindled and blazing away merrily in front of the hut, to the evident satisfaction of the bystanders, who could hardly be persuaded to handle the mysterious tools of Obeah. This man had a great reputation for sorcery, and a number of people who would never be suspected of encouraging witchcraft had been known to come from long distances to consult him or purchase some love spell.

The secret of the reputation of these Obeahmen and their frequent success in detecting thieves—which is also a part of their profession—is most likely due to a retentive memory and a system of cross-questioning all those who come to consult them. It is also very probable that they possess a knowledge of numerous tricks and deceits, handed down to them by their African progenitors, with which they astonish even educated persons, and perform wonders which would almost convert one to a belief in magic. My friend the priest told me many other interesting experiences he had had of the work of these West Indian sorcerers, and I wish I could remember them now. From witchcraft we gradually came to talking about mysterious happenings that apparently defied explanation. I find in the book that I am quoting from that he told me the following story in this connection.

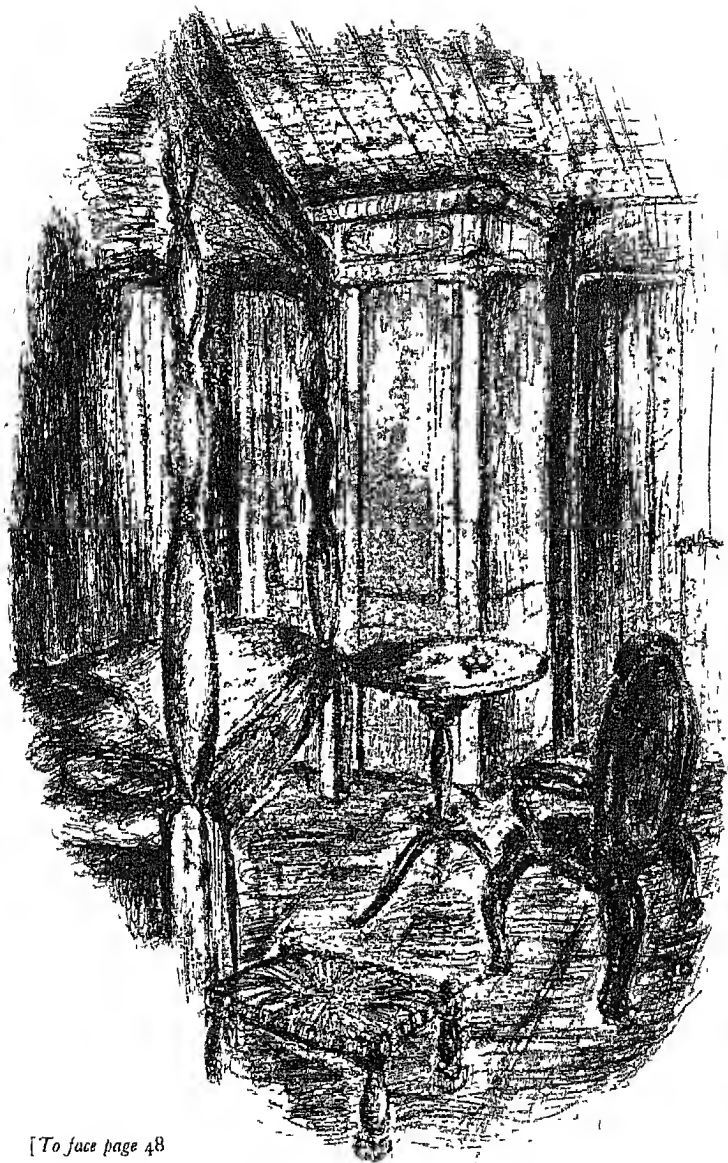
“Some years ago,” he said, “I was in Trinidad, and had been sent by the Archbishop to take charge of a remote and undeveloped parish far into the interior of the island. There being no Presbytery I had to make shift temporarily with a lodging in a small wooden house, of which one room was occupied by an old coloured woman who lived there with her little girl. I found that this woman was looked on with a good deal of dread by the people, being supposed to possess a knowledge of a good many unholy arts, and it was confidently hoped that my near neighbourhood would do her good.

“When taking possession of my part of the house I was shown her room, and noticed particularly that it contained some really handsome pieces of the

massive old furniture which is so much esteemed by the coloured folk. A tremendous four-poster with handsomely turned pillars stood in one corner near a ponderous mahogany wardrobe, while various other bits of furniture pretty well filled the little room. The door of her apartment opened on to my room, which she had to pass through every time she went out of the house. This was an unpleasant arrangement, but was shortly to be remedied by having another door made in her room, leading outside.

"The night after I had taken possession, sometime in the small hours of the night, I was awakened by hearing through the wooden partition a sort of crooning sound proceeding from my neighbour's room. It seemed to be a monotonous chant, and lasted so long that it soon lulled me to sleep again. Next morning, having got up and dressed, I noticed that all was perfectly quiet next door and, on listening intently for some time, failed to hear a single sound. I feared that something might have gone wrong. I called out but received no answer. Before going to bed I had placed a chair against the door leading into the woman's room, and saw that it was undisturbed. Fearing that an accident had happened, I opened the door. To my great amazement I saw that the room was perfectly empty and that, apparently, it had been swept clean!

"On examining the room carefully I found that it had only two small windows in addition to the door that led into my room. From that day to this neither I nor anyone else in the district ever got a trace of that old woman or of her daughter or of the furniture. How she managed to move all that massive



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furniture out of that little room has ever remained an inexplicable mystery. I would have defied any man to move the wardrobe alone, single-handed, and even if the old woman had had strength enough to carry the furniture away, she never could have dragged it through my room without disturbing me. However, these are the facts of the case, and I have never been able to explain them."

On another occasion we were again talking about the quaint ideas that were then prevalent among the unsophisticated coloured folk, and especially among his own Roman Catholic congregation, and he again complained of the difficulties he experienced in fighting their superstitions.

"It is only after years of work among these simple people," the priest said, "that the depth of their credulity can be gauged. Many a Catholic clergyman, newly arrived from Europe, would be grieved and horrified if he knew the reasons that, in many cases in this island, prompted many of his congregation to place offerings of lighted tapers at the foot of the statues of favourite Saints along the walls of his church."

This reminds me of a rather amusing incident that occurred to me when I was in Grenada, more than half a century ago, and which I related in my book *Obeah*.

A considerable sum of money had been abstracted from my bedroom. A broken window indicated that the robbery had most likely been perpetrated by someone from the outside of the house. My two servants had been with me for some time and I knew that I could trust them. Moreover, they protested

their innocence with evident sincerity. They were almost as distressed by my loss as I was, but could not think of any person in the village who might reasonably be suspected. An hour later my groom, a simple and a rather stupid but honest coloured lad, came to me saying that if I gave him five shillings he could promise to find the money. On my asking him how he proposed to act, he astonished me by saying, "I go put a candle on de thief's head, Sah, and he sure must bring de money back." "You stupid idiot!" I cried, "What on earth do you mean?" "Oh yes, Sah, I going to Father Caroni to buy a three shilling blessed candle, and I go put it, alight, before St. Anthony's statue, and de man who tief de money must bring it back to you or he going mad right off." I was amused to hear that some priests enjoyed a higher reputation than others with regard to the mysterious powers of the lighted candles blessed by them. Unfortunately, the matter does not always rest there.

This reminds me that once, when I was in Nigeria, I did a little bit of Obeah work myself. My gold cigarette case had disappeared from Government House, and I determined to test the efficacy of a proceeding which a friend had told me that he had tried with success in another part of West Africa in a case of theft.

I caused all the servants, including the out-door people, to be assembled in a courtyard, and made them stand in a circle. There were fifteen of them. Standing in the centre and speaking through an interpreter, I made them a discourse, declaring that I knew a great deal about magic and its mysteries and

that, though I seldom practised them, I could perform remarkable things especially in regard to the discovery of thieves.

Having soon got them into the requisite state of nervousness as to what I might be going to do, I produced a bowl of fine white powder. After making several mysterious and impressive passes over the powder which, I may say, was nothing more than ordinary flour, I ordered each man to stick out his tongue. I then placed on each of these unattractive organs a good tablespoonful of the flour, telling them that, at a given signal, they were to swallow the magic powder. I told them that all those who were innocent of the theft could swallow without difficulty, whereas the thief would be unable to do so and, unless he confessed his guilt, would in a short time meet with a terrible fate.

The process worked like a charm. The fourteen innocent men had no difficulty whatever in swallowing the flour, but the fifteenth, who knew his guilt and was terrified by the awful consequences which I had threatened, apparently could not produce the amount of saliva required to enable him to swallow the flour, fell on his knees and almost inarticulately begged for mercy. The fellow was an under-gardener and very soon produced the cigarette case.



A SMALL sailing craft has just passed so close to the rather flimsy wall of my aquarium that I thought it was going to cause a minor disaster. It was loaded down to the gunwale and big heaps of gleaming white salt covered the deck. The sight of that salt brought back to my mind a rather interesting incident connected with my early youth.

When we were very small children—a very long time ago now—my sister and I lived for a time in Brittany. We had an excellent old Breton nurse, and she taught us several little games that are common among the children of that part of France. There was one that I remember well.

She used to take an ear of a kind of wild oats, commonly found growing alongside footpaths. She would break this ear in two and replace the two bits in their original position. She would then place the ear between her thumb and forefinger of her left hand and, with the right hand, give a smart tap on her wrist. This smack would cause the upper piece of the ear to jump upwards while she would sing the following words in French:—

*Bourguignon salé, l'épée au côté,  
La barbe au menton, saute, Bourguignon!*

These lines might be translated:—

“Salted Burgundian, sword by your side,  
Your beard on your chin, jump, Burgundian!”

These words to our small ears sounded rather like gibberish, but, oddly enough, I have never forgotten them.

About ten years ago, when motoring through the south of France, I stopped at the splendid mediaeval city bordering on the Gulf of Lyon called Aigues Mortes. It is a wonderful place and its towering battlements dating back to the twelfth century are still in a remarkable state of preservation. I was told that in the Middle Ages the town was right on the seashore and was a great centre for the production of salt. In the interval the sea has receded so much that Aigues Mortes is now several miles from the shore. But a number of great mounds around the walls attracted my attention and I asked what they were. I was then told that sometime in the fourteenth century the Duke of Burgundy had made a great attack on the town and the siege was a long one. The people of Aigues Mortes defended themselves so bravely that the enemy was finally routed. In the last unsuccessful assault so many of the Burgundian army were slain that there was a difficulty about disposing of the bodies, and the people of Aigues Mortes concluded that the best way to settle the matter was to put them into big heaps and to cover them with great quantities of salt. And there the vanquished Burgundians doubtless remain to this day, after a lapse of several centuries.

The little couplet sung by my nurse evidently referred to these salted Burgundians and must have been a sort of triumphal chant.

I made many inquiries among the local people and was surprised to find that none had any recollection

of the couplet. It is curious that a complete stranger to the locality should have been able to acquaint them of those lines. It is also very strange that its remembrance should, nevertheless, have travelled to the North of France and have survived, after many centuries, in the mind of my old Breton nurse.

The shades of night are now falling fast. The stars are beginning to twinkle in a darkening blue sky and the melodious mocking-birds in the trees on the shore are beginning their lovely evensong. The pale crescent of an April moon is rising high in the sky and it is time to close these notes for the day.

★ 8 ★

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YESTERDAY, while searching among my papers for something quite different, I came across a file headed "Strange Happenings." Among those papers, which are the accumulations of many years, I found one which bore the headline "A Shower of Stones." It was an account of an extraordinary occurrence which I came across while visiting Jamaica in 1896. I had heard more than once of the mysterious and inexplicable fall of stones inside and outside of houses in various parts of the world, but had never come across first-hand evidence.

I was on my way back to Nassau, and had to stay a couple of days at Montego Bay, on the north coast





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of the island, to await the steamer that would take me to Nassau *via* Florida. Montego Bay at the present day is a flourishing and highly developed winter resort for Americans, and possesses a number of fine hotels.

But in 1896 it was only a small village and I found it difficult to find any place that would give me a night's lodging. After a long search, however, I was led to a house belonging to a white lady, with two daughters, who very kindly offered to take me in.

The next day I was talking to one of the daughters about a strange case that I was told had happened in Jamaica, in which a great quantity of stones had apparently fallen into a room through the ceiling without doing any damage to the roof. The young lady at once exclaimed, "But that was the very thing that happened to my own mother!"

I became quite excited at the prospect of getting some really first-hand evidence, and begged that the lady might be produced at once. She proved, unfortunately, to be bedridden, but after some necessary arrangements had been made she very kindly allowed me to see her in her bedroom. She was a woman of about sixty years of age, and gave me a very clear and concise account of a wonderful happening. She added to her kindness by allowing me to write down her statement in her own words:—

"It was twenty-two years ago," she said, "and my husband, who was a sea-captain, owned what we call a "Pen" where we kept cattle, about twenty miles from here. The house was a bungalow of stone and the roof was of shingles. One evening just after dark my coloured maid and I were sitting on the steps of

the porch just outside the open door of the sitting-room. We had been there for about a quarter of an hour when we suddenly heard a strange and loud noise coming from the room behind us. It sounded like large weights falling on the floor. We looked round in alarm, but it was so dark in the room that we could see nothing. We were so frightened that we ran out into the garden and hid behind the trees. The noise continued for, I should think, two or three minutes, and then ceased completely.

"Some minutes later we plucked up courage and went to see what had happened. We found the sitting-room floor almost covered with stones. Some were as large as a cricket ball, but the majority were about the size of an egg. They were just ordinary stones such as you might find anywhere in the surrounding grounds, and a few had old mortar sticking to them. I felt sure that they must have come from a partly broken down wall that was about a hundred feet away from the house. The most amazing thing was that the wooden ceiling was absolutely undamaged and the wooden shutters to the windows were all securely closed, as were also the doors, other than the one which we had sat in front of. Another amazing thing was that not a single object in the room had been damaged although there were glass ornaments on the tables.

"We were both extremely alarmed by this mysterious happening, and I took it as a sign that some dreadful thing had happened to my husband who was then at sea. We ran to our nearest neighbours, who were about a quarter of a mile away, and they came back with us and saw for themselves all the

stones lying about. We were, of course, too much alarmed to sleep in my room that night, and took refuge with our neighbours. Many people, including the parish priest, came next day to see what had happened. The stones were picked up, and they filled more than half a barrel.

"The clergyman begged us to have the courage to return to the house that evening to see whether there would be a repetition of the phenomenon. We did so, and the clergyman and a number of other people came with us, and as soon as it began to grow dusk we all took our seats in the porch. The furniture in the sitting-room was placed in exactly the same position as on the preceding evening. It soon became dark, for it was a moonless night, and nothing happened. After a time we lit a lamp and saw that all in the room was in a normal state. At the suggestion of the clergyman we put out the light, and had hardly resumed our seats when the stones began to fall, making a great noise but being quite invisible. We all rushed into the grounds around the house to see if anybody could be caught throwing them, but not a soul could be seen. While we were outside, stones could be heard falling inside the house. Mustering up our courage, we returned to the porch and again lit the lamp. The moment we did so the stones ceased to fall. As all remained quiet after a couple of hours we closed up the house and left the premises. I returned to stay with my neighbours, and remained with them for a week.

"Nothing more happened and, apart from the large quantity of stones in the barrel that had been gathered in the house, nothing remained to show



that the strange phenomenon had occurred. Neither the roof of the house nor the ceiling of the room showed the slightest trace of damage. There was never any recurrence of the mystery in that district. I may add," concluded the lady, "that my sailor husband returned to me in perfect health and without adventure of any kind." She added that the clergyman had written out a statement of the whole occurrence which, she believed, could be found somewhere in the archives of the district.

This incident interested me much, as it was the first time that I had ever come across anyone who had been a direct witness in an incident of this remarkable sort. Unexplained showers of stones, either inside or outside of houses, have frequently been reported in various parts of the world, but most of them have remained mysteries. The Society for Psychical Research is, I believe, inclined to ascribe these mysterious happenings to the pranks of disembodied spirits called "Poltergeists," which are said to be something like demented ghosts, and who amuse themselves by playing senseless tricks on human beings. I think I know a good deal about fish, but must confess to complete ignorance as regards ghosts, crazy or otherwise!

MOST people to whom I have spoken about the apparent intelligence of fish have expressed surprise or incredulity. Many of them, who have never seen fish alive in their native habitat, have said, "But surely, fish have no sense!" They have usually only observed them, if alive, in the small, glass-fronted compartments in which they are exhibited in aquariums, and have never observed the evidences of the joyousness and amazing vivacity displayed by many kinds of fish in freedom.

Anyone who, like myself, has had many opportunities of noticing the behaviour of fish moving about in a spacious enclosure cannot but be impressed by their constant movements, their inquisitiveness, their purposeful actions, their likes and dislikes of other individuals and their reactions to unfamiliar occurrences. The rapidity with which many of them seem to grasp a situation would indicate that they are capable of great quickness of thought and ability to act upon it. An illustration of this faculty came to my notice in connection with the aquarium I had some years ago in Mauritius.

When spending happy week-ends at a delightful house, which I had built on the gleaming white shores of a little coral island, bathed by the turquoise waters of Blue Bay, we often used in the early mornings to go and intercept the native fishing-boats that came in through the breaks in the reefs. The fishermen used to ply their business in the great depths of

the Indian Ocean, and we often found in their boats amazing specimens of rare and beautiful fish which, if alive, I was able to transfer to my open-air aquarium.

I remember on one occasion coming across one boat which had made such a successful trip that its deck was piled up with fish of all kinds. On the top of the heap I noticed a magnificent specimen of a species unknown to me. It was about a foot long, but very broad and thick. The body colour was of lustrous black on which white spots, about the size of a penny, were symmetrically placed. The snout was formed of a large beak of vivid orange colour, which was repeated in the tail and fins. The fish appeared to be dead, which was not surprising, as it had been lying exposed to the broiling sun for more than an hour. On handling it, however, it seemed to me to be still showing some signs of life and I brought it away with me.

It took us more than half an hour to get home, and when we reached the aquarium the fish seemed to be quite dead. On the chance that it might revive I threw it into the water. To my surprise not only did the fish immediately recover its senses, but, like a flash, darted to one of the corners of the pool in which there was a shelter with an opening just sufficiently large to admit the fish. I thought it extraordinary that the creature, which had been apparently insensible and practically dead for quite a long period, was able not only to recover consciousness in a fraction of a second, but also to become immediately aware of a place where it could find safety. It seemed to me that no human being, after long insen-

sibility, could have grasped a situation so instantaneously.

That fish became very quickly tame, and four days after its introduction would come up to me with the other fish to be fed. It showed, moreover, that it had a kindly and generous disposition. When biting off a piece of the food which I offered, it would then draw back to allow one of the much smaller fish to have a bite. I noticed this on several occasions and have an excellent photograph showing the act in progress for the benefit of a tiny little angel fish which often accompanied it. Unfortunately, this remarkable fish did not long grace my aquarium. Its eyes began to protrude each day to an increasing extent and they finally dropped out. It was certainly a deep sea fish and its eyes, being deprived of the pressure to which they were accustomed, could not remain in place.

This quickness of perception on the part of this fish reminded me of something that I recently read in a book by the late Dr. Crile in which he dealt with the subject of energy in animals and the glands which control it. While the thyroid gland, he said, governs the constant level of energy, the adrenal glands stimulate "flash," or "crisis" energy.

He pointed out that in animals whose movements are generally slow and ponderous there is usually not much difference in weight between the two glands. He went on to say that in the tiny African mouse, whose life is one of constant insecurity, the adrenal or "crisis-energy" are nine times as heavy as the thyroid. A correspondingly great difference was found in the number of heart beats per minute—28 for the elephant and 300 for the mouse.

Anyone who has suddenly approached a seaside pool containing fish must have noticed the extreme rapidity and directness with which the little creatures dart for shelter. They do not swim hither and thither in indecision but nearly always dart, like arrows, straight towards a crevice or hole in a rock or under a stone. This indicates an amazing quickness of perception and clearness of purpose and, if fishes do possess such things as adrenal and thyroid glands, the former must exceed the latter very greatly in size. I should think also that the 300 heart beats of a mouse, as mentioned by Dr. Crile, must often be paralleled in the small fish that dart about like flashes either for their amusement or to escape from danger.

My fisherman assures me that the hearts of fish beat "all same like hearts of a genelman" but could give me no information as to the rate of beats. I am inclined to think, however, as in the case of the ponderous elephant and the excitable mouse, there is probably a great difference in the heart beats of a whale and those of a volatile little fish.

In this connection I remember that, when I was in Mauritius, there was, in the beautiful gardens at Government House, a remarkable specimen of the Giant Tortoise. It had been brought from the Seychelles by the heroic General Gordon, who commanded the Royal Engineers in Mauritius during eighteen months just before he went to Khartoum. This section of Gordon's career is, by the way, a fact that was little known even to his biographers. Strachey, for instance, in his account of Gordon's life, dismisses it in a couple of lines, merely saying that "in 1880-1881 Gordon wasted eighteen months

digging drains in Mauritius." As a matter of fact he—"but," as the immortal Kipling would have said, "that is another story."

Now, to return to my tortoise, I may say that it was the most stupid and lethargic creature imaginable. Although it was not tethered or confined in any way, it never moved more than a few yards away from its usual resting-place. The fact that it was believed to be nearly two hundred years old and weighed 180 lbs. is perhaps a valid excuse for its habits of exaggerated repose. Although for months I gave it a banana every morning, it never showed the slightest sign of interest in my approach or of recognition of me. One day I felt its pulse, and was not surprised to find that it had a regular and sedate beat of six to the minute. We may assume, therefore, that its thyroid gland must have been a giant in comparison with the adrenal.

Some of my friends have, on occasions, seemed to consider that I am apt to ascribe to fish a greater degree of intelligence and sensibility than may be warranted. But the observations that I have been able to make of the behaviour of fish in open-air aquariums, both in Mauritius and in this island during a number of years, have led me to believe that some kinds of fish do possess a degree of reasoning power which raises them high in the scale of the animal world. Over and over again I have heard people assert that "fish have no feelings," basing this belief on the fact that fish are cold-blooded. Our sporting fishermen, of course, would be glad to agree with this idea. I have watched several specimens dying gradually from injuries, and the convulsions

that they have exhibited, sometimes for hours, could not possibly have been due to anything else than great suffering. The colours of their skins or scales would vary violently and the eyes generally showed striking changes in pigmentation.

The strangest of the powers possessed by fish is the capacity to change their colours with extreme rapidity and at will. Tropical fish especially possess this gift to an amazing degree. The only other creatures that I know of that are able to alter the colour of their skins are certain lizards and some spiders. My scientific knowledge is quite insufficient to describe how the fish "change their spots," but I think I am safe in saying that under the stress of certain emotions fish are able, by means connected with their nervous systems, to change completely, in the split part of a second, the colour of almost any part of their skins and scales and even of their fins.

The reasons for these changes of colour are probably various, but I think that the principal one is camouflage for the purpose of escape from enemies. Fish have probably acquired gradually this art of camouflage to an almost incredible degree, millions and perhaps billions of years before men did. The people who in our recent great wars have been daubing ships, buildings and weapons in eccentric patterns and colours might with advantage have taken tips from the denizens of the deep. I have read somewhere that biologists have decided that the retina of a fish's eye is stimulated only by light and shade, but I am inclined to be bold enough to question this decision, and to wonder why, if fish can

only distinguish light and shade, they assume such marvellous varieties of brilliant colours.

Fish found in northern waters usually show only a variety of brown and grey tones, similar to the rocks and weeds common to those latitudes, whereas in the tropics, where the sea floor is marvellously decorated by corals and marine growths of the most brilliant tints and tones, the fish have the power of imitating them to a fantastic degree. The coral shores of tropic islands, especially, are jewelled by some of the loveliest creations of nature, rivalling butterflies and humming-birds in the beauty and richness of their colouring.

Among the fish in my aquarium I have noticed a marked difference in the capacity to change colour. They all seem able to do it, but some are far greater artists than others. But in all cases the rapidity of the power is amazing. It can, I think, be likened to blushing, and a fish can instantaneously change certain portions of its skin that are normally black, white or grey to the most vivid gold, scarlet or blue, or any other tones which would melt into the colours of corals and sea-weeds, and so render them almost invisible to enemies that may be pursuing them. They can not only alter their colours but also change the patterns and designs displayed.

These frequent evanescent changes of pigment and pattern would make one believe that they are the expressions of a fish's thoughts and impressions. They must certainly be evidence of definite volition on their part. I think that fish, when confined in the small glass-fronted compartments usually found in aquariums, rarely display these marvellous changes,



and they can only be adequately observed when the creatures are either in the open sea or in the comparative freedom allowed in an enclosure such as the one I have constructed.

The champion quick-change artist in my pool is the grouper. The one I am looking at now is about 15 inches long and is a strong stout fish. It is usually very shy, and does not issue from its hiding-place unless one refrains for some time from making any movement. Normally this grouper has a body colour of almost the same tone as the sand on which it may be lying, but it also displays, when alarmed, broad vertical stripes of vivid black. The head then also assumes a handsome pattern of intricate dark lines of shield-shape. If it be further alarmed it can turn entirely to a deep brown. Dark vertical bars are the commonest form of camouflage among fish, thus giving a striated pattern which blends better than any other with a variegated background.

The trigger fish is also a wonderful exhibitor of changing colour, and can turn from a pale grey to lovely varieties of bright blue tones. When alarmed, or when about to die, it assumes in the fore part of the belly a large patch of yellow, deepening to a rich orange. Another of my fish, the rock-hind, at one moment may be a vivid pink dotted all over with small black spots, and a moment later may present itself in an entirely different garb.

In an American magazine article, dealing with the coloration of fish, I read the following bit which is particularly interesting in this connection: "Most fishes are darker on top than underneath. If fishes were light on top, hungry birds, flying overhead,

could see them more easily than they do. The fish would show more clearly against the bottom of a lake or river or sea, and if the underside of fishes were dark, enemy fish, swimming below them, would see them more easily. They would show more clearly against the sky."

★ 10 ★

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THE radio this morning tells us at last of the downfall of that sinister clown Mussolini. His dream of overwhelming power in the Mediterranean and of omnipotence in Northern Africa has gone the way of all dreams, and the bombastic boastfulness which seems to have fascinated his compatriots appears now to have been one of the chief characteristics that attracted his people and brought him to power. He seems to have tried to persuade the Italians that they were the lineal descendants of the ancient Romans, and he did everything possible to revive even the manners and customs of the people of the Eternal City.

I remember in this connection how, nine years ago, I read in the London *Times* that foreign travellers in Italy, instead of being received by hotel managers and their staffs with the usual polite bow, would henceforth be greeted by the Roman Salute, which was described by the organ of the National Hotel

and Travel Federation as "that superbly aesthetic gesture which, besides being an exquisitely Fascist greeting, is envied and imitated throughout the world."

This high-falutin bit of Italian exuberance inspired me to write a letter to *The Times*, and it was headed "The Roman Salute"; and as my effusion attracted a good deal of attention and some amusement I am inclined to revive it by inserting here its salient portions.

"Though the Duce and his enthusiastic followers appear to claim no more than a Roman origin for their expression of Fascist idealism I venture to suggest that this 'noble salute' may be traceable to a far more hoary source.

"When I had charge of the affairs of Uganda, many years ago, the ruler of one of the 'kingdoms' of that Protectorate, the Mukama of Toro, knowing that I was making a small collection of wild animals at Government House, kindly sent me a very fine, full-grown chimpanzee. The poor fellow had been captured in the dense forest bordering on the Congo and had started on his fourteen days' journey to Entebbe in a rough wooden cage carried by porters. The chimpanzee had shown great fierceness on the way, and his strength was such that he had soon made a wreck of his cage. The porters, who were much afraid of the animal, had finally tied the unfortunate creature to a pole so securely that, by the time it reached me, it was a mass of sores and cuts. His temper had evidently been ruined, and, after being placed in the large cage which had been prepared for him, he roared with rage almost continuously. The

sight of a native especially infuriated him, and many weeks elapsed before he could tolerate the neighbourhood of a negro.

"What induces me to write about this chimpanzee in this connection, is his remarkable attitude in regard to myself. Not only did he not show, from the very beginning, any animosity towards me, but whenever I approached his cage, in which he usually sat moping, he would advance towards me, uttering a guttural groan and raising his right hand and arm above his head in the most approved Fascist style. This happened so often that I was obliged to accept it as a form of chimpanzee salutation. Is it possible that the outward and visible sign of Fascism, far from having originated in Imperial Rome, may for countless ages have been the recognized form of greeting observed by those distant cousins of ours who from time immemorial have peopled the mysterious forests of tropical Africa?"

My letter was, of course, intended as a skit, but to my surprise it was taken up seriously by influential people in Italy who in no measured terms protested that I had insulted the whole of the Italian nation. The editor of *The Times*, in fact, told me that diplomatic representations on the matter were even being threatened! Friends in Italy wrote warning me not to go there until the matter had blown over, and even from Germany, where the *Heil Hitler* action closely resembled the Fascist salute, considerable indignation was expressed. Oddly enough my joke was taken seriously in some scientific quarters, and I received from two learned professors, one in Canada and one in the United States, letters asking me for further

information in regard to the chimpanzee's action. One of these gentlemen seemed particularly anxious to know whether the animal, when making the gesture, turned the inside or the outside of his hand towards me.

★ 11 ★

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DURING the last week or so I have noticed the disappearance of several of the smaller fish in the pool and I now know the cause of this. It is a rather large moray, a sort of sea snake, which has found its way into the aquarium, probably by burrowing under the enclosing walls. We caught the horrid creature, which was rather more than two feet long and very thick. It was of mottled brown and green in colour and its movements were typically serpentine. The head, in proportion to its body, was remarkably small and pointed, and the mouth was furnished with rows of very sharp and pointed teeth. The eyes were like two very small, white beads and gave a particularly malevolent impression. My servant hooked it very quickly by the presentation of a plump bit of conch meat.

When I entered the cabana this morning it had not seemed to notice me but wormed its way slowly about the bottom of the aquarium. Strangely enough, the little fish did not seem to be at all alarmed by it, and hardly moved away from its neighbourhood.

The bigger fish appeared to take no notice of the creature or to show any fear of it. It was probably full fed and consequently not dangerous at that time, and the fish were aware of the fact. This reminds me of something very interesting which I learnt when I was in Kenya in the districts where lions abound. I was travelling through the Athi Plains by train, and admiring the vast collection of game of all sorts that was grazing on the short lush grass. Suddenly I saw the heads of a great number of animals raised high in the air, and a moment later the vast herds broke into a wild gallop into the far distance. A friend, an experienced big-game hunter, who was sitting opposite me, said, "They have scented a *Simba*." And sure enough, I soon espied about a quarter of a mile away a tawny shape slithering through a patch of low bushes. A moment later the lion came out into the clear ground, and it seemed to me, judging by its attitude, that it was saying, "Damn! Missed again!"

That journey from Mombasa to Nairobi is one of my most delightful memories. I was then on my way to assume the government of Uganda. By the courtesy of the Director of Railways a bench had been fixed to the front of the engine, and from it I and my A.D.C. had the most wonderful views of the country. The train speeded up gradually from sea-level to Nairobi at an altitude of about 6,000 feet, and for most of the way the track passed through vast grassy plains, on which grazed incredibly large herds of zebras, antelopes, and all kinds of lesser game. We would even see, now and then, graceful, long-legged giraffes, a solitary rhinoceros, or even a family of lions.

During that journey I had a very interesting talk

with this big-game hunter, and he told me many curious facts about the animals of East Africa, and especially about the peculiarities of lions. They are far from having the ferocity that they are usually credited with, and rarely kill except to procure their food. Man-eaters are comparatively scarce, and are usually aged lions which have become infirm and unable to run down and kill the fleet animals which are their usual food. Urged by hunger, a lion in that condition may venture into a neighbourhood of a village and meeting, perchance, an aged female or small child, leaps on to the unfortunate creature and makes a conveniently-provided meal. Finding how easy it is to get such prey, the lion becomes a confirmed man-eater and, until slain, may be responsible for a great number of victims. I was told that lions in good condition usually feed only twice a week.

Their food must be fresh and generally consists of a zebra or some kind of antelope. The killing is usually done by a terrible blow with the paw upon the neck of the beast, and death is almost instantaneous. My informant told me that the animals appear to be able to know, by some marvellous instinct, whether the lion is out for slaughter or whether he has lately had his fill of food. In the latter case they appear to realize that he is harmless, and my friend told me that more than once he had seen a lion walking through a herd of game which paid not the slightest attention to his presence. The placidity of my fish in the presence of the bloated moray makes me wonder whether they, like the wild animals, have the power of knowing if an enemy is in a dangerous condition or not.

LAST evening I had another talk with the old man, Moses, about West Indian superstitions, and he was in very good form. Most of them, of course, were of African origin, but it was soon clear to me that many of them came from various parts of Europe, especially from England and France. These ideas were probably introduced into the islands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Irish prisoners deported by Cromwell to the island of Montserrat—where, by the way, the coloured folk still speak with a strong brogue and have Irish names—brought with them their Irish superstitions and doubtless transmitted them to their slaves. The hundreds of miserable prisoners who, after the battle of Sedgemoor, in Monmouth's rebellion, were presented to the Ladies of the Court and sold by them to the plantations in Barbados, were responsible for the introduction of the folklore and superstitions of Dorset and Devonshire. In the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe I found among the negroes many of the old French ideas about vampires and other matters connected with the Black Art as practised in the pre-Bastille days. I even came across a small book in French, published in the eighteenth century, which described in much detail the horrible ceremony of a Black Mass.

We may laugh at some of the West Indian Islands people, who have a certain amount of education and are by no means deeply coloured, but retain a strong



feeling of fear and belief in this form of sorcery. The practice of Obeah seems to flare up now and then in certain localities, and about twenty years ago in the highly developed island of Antigua, one of the Leeward Islands, there was such a spate of prosecutions against the practice of Obeah that the Legislature found it necessary to enact a law which, for its severity, might almost have been passed by a Parliament in Jacobean times in Old England. It was found that the number of people who were discovered to be selling the "instruments of Obeah," such as the bones and feathers of birds, dried snake skins, claws of reptiles and all the other farrago of rubbish that make up the stock-in-trade of the West Indian Obeahman, was very large. In aggravated cases the culprit could receive a severe flogging as well as imprisonment.

I remember that in the year 1903 a dreadful case of murder occurred in the island of St. Lucia, one of the Windward Islands. It created a considerable stir at the time, and reports of the trial of the perpetrators were published in most of the West Indian newspapers. A couple of coloured peasants in St. Lucia, who had acquired a few acres of cocoa and were consequently people of some substance, met a man from one of the neighbouring French islands who assured them that a rich treasure was buried in a spot on their land. He said that he was in communication with spirits who were guarding this treasure, and that its location had been pointed out to him by them. He agreed to show them the place provided they would share the gold with him, and give him as a preliminary fee a couple of goats.

The men agreed to his terms, and they were told to dig at night in a certain place. They excavated a large hole, but without result. The stranger then told them that an evil spirit of great potency was pressing the treasure deeper into the ground in a measure as they dug, and that the Devil, with whom the spiritualist claimed to be in league, would not allow the gold to be taken unless a much larger fee were paid. A calf was demanded and was handed over.

The men dug and dug, but still there was no result, and the two St. Lucians began to charge the stranger with having swindled them. The man, however, persisted in his assurance that the treasure was really there, and finally stated that the Devil would not surrender it until a human sacrifice had been provided. The credulity and cupidity of the two peasants was such that they agreed to go to this last extremity. One of them went to Barbados and managed to secure from an old negro woman the custody of a little black boy, seven years of age, who was an orphan. The child was brought to St. Lucia and preparations were made by the three men for the final act. It was decided that the sacrifice to the Devil should be made in the form of a "Black Mass," a description of which they had found in an old book called *Le manuel du petit Albert*.

The case was brought to light by a woman who was living with one of the peasants and, in the evidence which she gave to the magistrate, she described the whole horrible affair. She said that a great flat-topped stone, on the bank of a small stream that flowed through the men's land, had been selected to serve as an altar. In the depth of a moon-

less night the unfortunate child, bound hand and foot, had been laid on the stone, with four lighted candles around him. The stranger, clad in a white sheet, tottered round and round the "altar" mumbling incantations out of his book while the two men, crouching on the ground, gazed spell-bound at him.

The details of the doing to death of the poor little child, as described by the woman, are too horrible to relate. Suffice it to say that the body was finally ripped open and the heart wrenched out. It was placed in a tin basin and carried into the dwelling, where further occult ceremonies had to be performed. The woman had witnessed the dreadful scene from the interior of the hut and had been so horrified by it all that, unable to conceal the knowledge of so heinous a crime, she had fled down to the town and reported the matter to the police. The three men, of course, paid the penalty for their terrible crime, but the horrid fact remains that such a monstrous act of superstition could take place in a British colony at the beginning of the twentieth century.

I mentioned, just now, an ancient book on French superstitions and its name, *Le manuel du petit Albert*. Oddly enough this name takes my mind away to the far-distant island of Ceylon when, during a visit there, I had a long and most interesting talk with that great Frenchman, Monsieur Clemenceau.\*

\* Much of the following is taken from an article by me entitled "A Great Frenchman," which appeared in the *Sunday Times* of August 13, 1939, and my thanks are due to the proprietors for permission to reproduce it here.

There is no lovelier place in Ceylon than the hill-station at Nuwara Eliya, and it was my good fortune to spend a couple of weeks there in February, 1921, when the temperature was ideal and the conditions perfect.

I was resting, after a morning round of golf, on the green lawn of the comfortable Grand Hotel, when I espied Monsieur Clemenceau, with two French companions, coming along the path. They were evidently returning from a long walk, and were mopping their brows after the ascent up the hill. The trio presented an unwonted appearance in that happy land where white flannels or linen suits and white *topees* are the rule. The great man himself was wearing dingy black cloth trousers and a sort of frock-coat of dark grey alpaca. On his head was one of those curious yellow straw helmets, of deplorable shape, often affected by Frenchmen in the South of France. His two companions were also clothed in sombre garments which looked as if they had served at many a funeral in the motherland. Their general aspect was that of *bons bourgeois* of provincial type.

I had already had the pleasure of making Monsieur Clemenceau's acquaintance at Anuradhapura, a few days before, and as soon as he espied me he genially exclaimed: "Ah! Monsieur le Gouverneur, je suis enchanté de vous revoir!" Separating himself from his companions of lugubrious aspect, he took his seat on a bench under a spreading acacia tree on the lawn and, bidding me to sit beside him, invited me to have a little *causette* while he rested awhile after his morning's exertion.

A wonderful man for his age, for he was then

about eighty. A sturdy, compact body on short legs and an appearance of remarkable energy and vigour. There was nothing *distingué* about either his air or his diction, but the authoritative tone of voice, the firm jaw and the vivid eyes that glittered as he spoke indicated unmistakably the power, genius and keenness of intellect that underlay the genial countenance. Under the big, ragged grey moustache one caught glimpses of a mouth that bespoke indomitable will, tempered by sarcastic *bonhomie*. His voice was pleasant but the general tone was louder than is usual among men of good breeding. While most of our talk was in French he often broke into excellent English with a slight American accent. He had spent some of his earlier years in the States.

When I began by congratulating him on the wonderful health and vigour that enabled him to walk about for hours under a blazing sun he replied: "Well, I don't know that I am so wonderful as all that. Wasn't there a man in the days gone by who, stretching out his hands, wished that they might shrivel away if he lied?" Looking whimsically at me he added: "I must have told a lot of lies in my life, *mon ami*, for both my hands have become *desséchées*." Holding them up he drew my attention to the fact that he always wore gloves, even at meals. On this occasion they were of grey cotton. He also said that he was suffering from diabetes.

When I told him that I was taking a few weeks' holiday from Mauritius, of which charming colony I was then in charge, and had visited Madagascar on my way to Ceylon, he asked me what I thought of that country. On my saying that I had been much

impressed by its great value and possibilities, he exclaimed, "No. No. If Madagascar were of any value you English would have grabbed it!" He went on to say that, in any case, he had always been opposed to colonial ventures for France, and always would be. "We can never be good colonists, and should not try to," said he. "France has no men to spare, especially since she has lost 1,300,000 of her best. She needs every one of her 40,000,000 people within her own borders to face the 60,000,000 enemies to the eastward of her."

"It was Bismarck," he went on to say, "who treacherously encouraged France to embark on schemes for colonial expansion, knowing that they would weaken her. He it was who incited France to go into Tunisia. It was Napoleon," he exclaimed with some excitement, "that never sufficiently to be execrated man, who plunged France into adventures overseas and was responsible for the comparative weakness of his country!" He continued for some time to speak with considerable vehemence on this subject, and it was evident that he belonged to the school which, in the early days of the Third Republic, was bitterly opposed to all colonial adventures.

On my asking what plans he had for the future the old gentleman replied: "I may have another year or two to live and am going to retire quietly to my little home in the Landes where I shall be admirably cared for. I shall write my *mémoires* and, as they will not be published until some years after my death, I am going to write just what I like!" And with a puckish gleam in his eye he added: "And I shall amuse myself *formidablement*!"

The scope of his knowledge and interests appeared to be immense, and there was not one of the many subjects that we touched on, during the two hours that we spent under that tree, with which he did not seem to be well acquainted. Even in the matter of African superstitions he was illuminating and accurate.

Among other things I mentioned to him the existence of a rather rare book called *Le manuel du petit Albert*, which I had come across in the French West Indies, and which contained a farrago of instructions for the concoction of spells and incantations. The book even contained directions for a "Black Mass" in its most revolting and dangerous form. Clemenceau knew all about it and said that the title of the little book was wrong. Instead of *Le manuel du petit Albert* it should have been *Le petit manuel d'Albert*. He went on to explain that the original work was an exhaustive treatise on Sorcery, in several volumes, produced by a writer called Albert in the seventeenth century, and that the book I had seen in the West Indies was only a greatly abbreviated reproduction. He expressed interest when I told him that among the French creoles of Mauritius witchcraft is always known as "Petit Albert."

Monsieur Clemenceau had just been spending a few weeks in India and, from what he said of British government in that great country, I judged that his observations had been superficial and not unaffected by a somewhat prejudiced eye. He expressed the view that "the problem of India" could be easily solved if the *people* of India would make an appeal to the *people* of Great Britain. But when I asked him who

were the "people" of India and to what class of ours they should appeal he replied with something indefinite about "the Indians stating their case in *The Times*," and otherwise evaded my question. His opinion on the work of Lord Curzon in India, save in regard to the conservation of ancient monuments, would not have satisfied that great Proconsul, but his praise of many men in the higher ranks of the Indian Civil Service was generous and evidently sincere.

I then gradually led the talk in the direction of the British politicians with whom he had been associated at Versailles, and he at once began by saying that, while he had a high opinion of the good sense of the British people, he had a very poor one of their Government. His remarks on most of the statesmen whose names I mentioned were often more pungent than polite. Frequently did the sharp eyes flash beneath the overhanging eyebrows at the remembrance of some bitter fight, and his criticisms were then worthy of the ferocity of the "Tiger."

His views on Mr. Asquith were wound up by, "He is a worn-out man. However, I ought not to say anything unkind about him as it was certainly he who brought England into the war: because without him . . ." and he made a gesture implying that, without Asquith's influence, we would have left France to her fate.

On the subject of Mr. Lloyd George he became very animated, and when I asked what he thought of him he shrugged his shoulders very expressively and threw out his hands as if to say that he was *impossible*. "C'est un homme qui ne sait jamais ce qu'il veut!" He repeated this in English: "He never knows what



he wants or what he is going to do next, and we could never discuss anything without quarrelling. On one occasion, indeed, we gesticulated so furiously over Wilson's head that the President thought we had actually come to blows and intervened accordingly." After a few more not too kind sidelights on our remarkable Prime Minister, Monsieur Clemenceau wound up by saying: "But Lloyd George is an *homme charmant*, and England ought to be ever grateful to him."

Concerning President Wilson he thought it only necessary to say that "he spoke like Jesus Christ and acted like the Devil!" (He seems to have liked this *dictum*, as I was told by Colonel House some years later that he had heard him say it in Paris in 1919.)

With this parting shot the "Tiger" rose to obey the hotel's luncheon bell, while I decided to postpone that meal until I had been able to jot down in my diary all that I could clearly remember of an exhilarating talk with the remarkable man whose influence on France, at the most critical time in her history, had been vital and patriotic.

## ★ 13 ★

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DURING the past month this island has been much in the public eye all over the world through the atrocious murder, in very mysterious circumstances, of Sir Harry Oakes. The accused, who was the son-

in-law of the victim, was this morning acquitted by a Bahamian jury. He was born in Mauritius, and as I spent eight of the happiest years of my life as Governor of that colony, and knew de Marigny's family, I have been especially interested in the case.

I have often been surprised by the lack of knowledge shown by most British people concerning one of our wealthiest and most interesting Crown Colonies. It was at the very beginning of the nineteenth century that Britain wrested from the French the beautiful and fertile island that lies in the Indian Ocean about five hundred miles to the east of Madagascar. Under the ownership of Napoleon Mauritius had become rich and prosperous, and some thousands of French people, most of whom were refugees from the terrors of the revolution, were producing great quantities of the sugar that was so valuable in those days. Not only was Mauritius a rich prize from a trade point of view, but in Napoleonic days it was a great thorn in the side of British Indian commerce. The island lay in the direct route from the Cape to India, and had become a nest of corsairs and privateers, who levied an immense toll on our merchant navy. It has indeed been estimated that the amount of our shipping lost or captured by the French, who commanded the Mozambique channel, was proportionately almost equal to our marine losses through attacks of U-boats during the first World War.

So serious was the situation that in 1810 a British squadron of four ships under Commodore Willoughby was sent to capture the island. They found there, lying in the almost landlocked bay of Mahebourg, five French warships commanded by Admiral

Duperey. So bitter was the struggle that after thirty hours of combat only one ship, a French one, remained afloat. This remarkable feat of arms is rarely mentioned in our school history books.

The survivors of the British crews were brought ashore as prisoners of war. The heroic Willoughby and the gallant French Admiral Duperey, who had both been grievously wounded in the battle, occupied the same house after the fight and apparently became fast friends. I remember being shown, in a small château on the outskirts of Grand Port, the room that was shared by these two fine sailors during their convalescence.

We could not, of course, accept this reverse, and a strict blockade of the island was established. Two years later a naval and military force of overwhelming strength was dispatched from India to Mauritius. Although a spirited and protracted defence of the island was put up by Decaen, one of Napoleon's best generals, the French were finally forced to capitulate.

The terms of surrender were, however, so generous that the island in practice remained thoroughly French in character. The Code Napoleon continued in force. French, equally with English, remained the language of the Law Courts and of the Government. The Roman Catholic Church continued to be on the paid establishment, and all property was confirmed to its possessors.

The result of this remarkably liberal treatment is that Mauritius, though loyal to the Empire, has remained as typically French as if, during the past one hundred and thirty years, it had remained a possession of France. Of its population of about half

a million about ten thousand are white, while the remainder are Indian immigrants or Creole Africans. Of the whites more than nine-tenths are the descendants of the old French refugees, and among them are many who can trace their descent from the old nobility of France.

During the two years of blockade prior to the final capture of the island hostilities appear often to have been conducted in a sporting and chivalrous spirit, very different from that which has prevailed in the great wars of recent years, and when I was in Mauritius I heard of a charming incident which illustrates this point. One of our ships engaged in the blockade seems to have been particularly well known to the Mauritians, and her black hull and gleaming spread of white canvas on the horizon were a familiar sight to the French colonists. In those days a captain of a warship, when engaged on protracted blockade duties, appears to have been permitted to have the society of his wife, and it is recorded in Mauritius that the lady who happened to be on board this particular cruiser, falling ill of the scurvy, would frequently be the recipient of fresh fruit and other delicacies sent off to her by the French Governor on shore, who had heard of her misfortune. Later on, her illness having seriously increased, the Governor, the Count de Malartic, begged her husband to send her ashore. She stayed at Government House and, after some weeks of the kindest care and attention, that courtly gentleman returned the lady to her husband, *saine et sauve*.

A few months later it was the Count de Malartic who fell ill—and of a mortal sickness. He had been

one of the best of the French Governors of Mauritius and his death was deeply regretted, not only by his own people, but by the enemy who blockaded his ports. So grateful was the Captain of our cruiser for the kindness shown to his wife that the day of the Governor's funeral was observed as a truce, so that a guard of honour of British sailors might fire a salute over the grave of a gallant enemy. Such was sometimes the spirit of war in those days.

This pretty episode had a sequel. Some forty years later Lady Gomme, the wife of the British Governor of that day, finding that the fine monument which was to have graced the grave of the Count de Malartic had never been completed and was falling into ruins, determined that the memory of the French *gentil-homme*, who had shown such kindness to an English woman, should not fall into oblivion. She therefore set to work and collected from all the British ladies then in Mauritius a considerable sum of money. With this the monument was completed according to the original design, and it still stands to-day an imposing memorial in the centre of the Champ de Mars at Port Louis.

I am further reminded of Mauritius this morning by the fact that, a little farther along the shore, I can see a clump of the tall and beautiful casuarina trees that abound in that island and are an almost equally frequent feature of a Nassau landscape. They thrive best in the neighbourhood of the coral beaches that gird this little island, and the long branches soar upwards in an elongated bouquet. The casuarina is a member of the great family of cedars and its feather-like foliage of tiny needles throws lacelike shadows



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on the sunlit ground beneath. The trunks of these trees are almost always straight and smooth and they often soar to a height of sixty feet and more. The timber, though fairly hard, is not fit for much save for firewood, for which it is excellent. Great plantations of casuarinas are, however, established and turned to a profitable and unusual purpose. The Mauritian system may be of interest to those people who are the happy possessors of young children for whose future some financial provision must be made.

Among the wise provisions made by the French when they governed Mauritius was the reservation of a strip of land almost all round the coast of the island. This belt, known as the *pas géométriques*, was, wherever possible, about three hundred metres wide, and was reserved for Government purposes. Though it could not be sold outright, it could however be rented on lease for considerable periods. Our Government has to a considerable extent continued this arrangement, and unoccupied land on the seaboard can be rented for agricultural purposes at a very low rate.

The chief industry of Mauritius is the production of sugar of high grade, and more than a quarter of a million tons are exported annually. The island is, in fact, one of the largest producers of sugar in the Empire, and the planters are for the most part prosperous and up to date. Up to the time of the first World War they were satisfied with prices ranging from twelve to fifteen pounds a ton. But in 1919, when sugar was extremely scarce all over the world, the Mauritian planters found themselves the sole possessors of the only existing considerable quantity of that product. The British Sugar Commission,



forced by circumstances to remain in control of the industry for some time longer, was in a cleft stick. The price of the Mauritian sugar soared to unheard-of heights, and the Commission was finally obliged to agree to a rate of ninety pounds a ton for the two hundred and forty thousand tons which the Mauritian planters were able to supply.

It fell to my lot, as Governor, to arrange for the financing of this great operation, and during 1919 I disbursed among the comparatively small number of planters no less a sum than £23,000,000. Great fortunes were made, and to one gentleman alone, who had supplied some ten thousand tons of sugar, I gave an authority to receive from The Treasury nine hundred thousand pounds! This was for one year's crop of an estate measuring less than a thousand acres.

It is sad to have to relate that, through extravagance in many cases, and unwise speculations, the great windfall of wealth which befell the Mauritian planters in great measure disappeared during the ensuing twenty years.

The foregoing may be considered to be rather a wide digression from the subject of casuarina trees which I started to write about, but these trees are an indispensable adjunct to the sugar industry, as immense quantities of fire-wood are required for the furnaces of the factories in which the juice of the sugar cane is transformed into beautiful white crystals, and the price paid for the fuel yields a very handsome profit to the grower of the trees. It is not an uncommon practice for a young Mauritian husband, on the appearance of the first or second baby, to rent from the Government twenty acres or more



of these *pas géométriques*, and the rate is extremely low. The land is generally of poor quality but very suitable for casuarinas. It is usually covered by low scrub and the cost of clearing it is very small. The young casuarina seedlings are set out in regular rows seven feet apart each way, and it is only during the first

year or so that any care is necessary to keep them sufficiently free from weeds. The young trees make rapid growth and by the end of the seventh year usually have a diameter of about five inches. Each alternate tree is then removed and is sold for making posts, etc. By that time the young trees have entirely covered the ground and there is no expense for cultivation. By the fourteenth year the trees have attained a considerable size and often have a diameter of twelve inches.

Again the owner cuts out every alternate tree for sale to the factories, thus leaving the area only bearing trees twenty-eight feet apart. At the end of the twenty-first year the Government lease is terminated and the whole forest is then cut down. Even a tract of twenty acres yields from these mature trees a capital sum that would be quite sufficient to provide a suitable dowry for a daughter or to enable a son to pursue studies for one of the learned professions.

I think that other sugar-producing colonies where the casuatina tree grows readily might perhaps do well to take a leaf out of the Mauritius book.

## ★ 14 ★

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MY old coloured cook, who is always very prone to tears, became a perfect Niobe this morning when informing me that all her savings, amounting to about £35, have been stolen out of her little shanty.

The poor soul was almost incoherent, but I managed to make out that she always hid her money in an old mustard tin, which in turn reposed in an ancient sock. She strongly suspected a neighbour who was her intimate friend.

Although the government in all our colonies does all possible to encourage the people to place their money in Savings Banks, those institutions are far from popular. The coloured folk have an idea that if they "got into trouble" the government would pounce on their money and confiscate it. I remember being told, when I was in Northern Nigeria, of an odd and very simple system of banking that was prevalent among the more or less primitive tribes. If a man found himself, through the sale of a horse or bullock, in possession of a substantial sum of cash he would look around among his friends for someone who wanted to borrow money.

He would lend the cash to him, but on the understanding that it was to be repaid on demand. It was unusual for any interest to be claimed on the loan. If, later on, the lender wished to have his money back it would usually be returned, but the trouble would begin if the borrower expressed his inability to produce the money. The lender, in such an event, would then say: "In that case I and my family are coming to live with you until you do repay this debt." The borrower, sooner than submit to such a costly invasion, would instantly scratch round to find someone else who had money to lend. This system appeared to work very well on the whole and was tantamount to a sort of collective security. It was of hoary antiquity.

An unhappy little black baby in a cottage near by has been crying all the morning and is rather disturbing my thoughts. I am told that it has been sick with "stomach troubles" for a long time and is likely soon to quit this troublous world.

There can be no doubt that a great deal of sickness and a high rate of infantile mortality in our sub-tropical colonies are due to bad water supplies. And yet the people often seem to show a reluctance to take advantage of supplies of pure water, and to prefer to drink the horribly polluted liquid to which they have always been accustomed.

Once, when I was taking my afternoon drive in the charming West Indian island of Antigua, I passed one of those fetid ponds, called Lees ponds, which are always to be found in the neighbourhood of a sugar factory. This one looked even more disgusting than usual, and it was evident that every conceivable thing was done in it: bathing, the washing of dirty clothes, and the watering of cattle, etc. And yet, to my surprise, I saw on its bank a coloured woman dipping her water jar into it after merely removing from the surface the green slime that covered it.

I stopped the carriage and bade the woman approach, and I said to her, "My good woman, I have just imposed on you people a rather heavy tax in order to pay for the cost of bringing pure water to a number of villages in this island, and yet I see you filling your jar with that horrible muck. One of the new stand pipes is just there, not thirty yards away, and yet you won't take the trouble to use the splendid water that I have provided for you!"

The woman replied: "Dat water, Massa, is no good."



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"Why?" I exclaimed.

"Because, Massa, it got no *body* in it!"

The provision of pure water is, of course, an admirable and essential thing. But in some primitive parts of the tropical world its introduction may perhaps, for some time to come, be followed by results that were not anticipated. I remember once sitting at a dinner party in London alongside of a distinguished engineer, who told me that he had just returned from Northern Nigeria. He said that he had been installing a complete supply of pure water for the great native city of Kano. As I had administered the government of Northern Nigeria from 1909 to 1912, I was much interested, especially as I vividly remembered the filthy mud holes alongside of their houses, from which the majority of the natives drew their water supplies.

I complimented the engineer on his great work, but rather surprised him by saying: "What you have done is certainly a splendid thing for the people of Kano, but I think we may expect to find among the natives, years ahead, a marked increase in the number of water-borne diseases, such as dysentery and typhoid which at present in West Africa are found mainly among Europeans."

"How so?" he exclaimed.

"Well," I replied, "it is only an idea that has just occurred to me. The natives of Africa have from time immemorial been accustomed to imbibe almost with impunity water of such a quality that a single spoonful of it might possibly mean death to a European. The comparative immunity usually enjoyed by the natives is, I am told, due to the



fact that during uncountable years his blood has been provided with a great stock of what are called 'anti-bodies' that destroy many of the water-borne germs which are often so fatal to the white man. Now, if the people of Kano, through the provision of pure water, will in future no longer drink polluted liquid, is it not possible that the friendly 'anti-bodies' will no longer be needed and may gradually disappear from their blood? If so, they would thus, in the days to come, be in the same position as Europeans. If," I continued, "the people of Kano remained always in their city all might be well. But such would not be the case. Most of them go constantly to work in their little farms, which are sometimes far removed from their homes and which are, of course, unprovided with pure water. They would drink the same old filthy stuff as of yore and, not possessing the beneficent 'anti-bodies' which formerly protected them, would fall victims to diseases which in the old days rarely afflicted them."

I was, of course, only chaffing my engineer friend, but I could see that he was wondering a little whether there might not be something in what I was saying.

## ★ 15 ★

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IT seems to me certain that of all the fish that I have had in my aquarium the trigger fish are among the most intelligent. They become rapidly accustomed to

the pool and swim about fearlessly after the first day. By the second or third day they come up close to me and usually stop for a few seconds to look at me. When doing so they always lie sideways and evidently observe me as intently as I gaze at them. They are very bold and are always among the first to arrive when food is being distributed.

They are among the most elegant of the fish in my collection, not only in colour but in shape. In form they greatly resemble the turbot of northern waters and in these islands are known by the fishermen by that name. The name of trigger fish, given to them by scientists, is on account of a large and strong dorsal fin which is probably one of the creature's weapons. This fin is composed of very strong spines, so rigid when they are erect that it is almost impossible to force them down. This cannot be done unless you first press down a small protuberance at the base of the fin, which acts as a sort of trigger.

These fish are certainly able to distinguish the nature of the food that is going to be offered before it is put into the water. When I dangle a piece of bread above the water they show no interest, but when a large piece of conch meat has been presented several inches above the surface the trigger fish station themselves under it in evident expectancy. Even when they have only been in the pool for less than a week they show excitement as soon as they see my servant breaking up a conch shell, preparatory to extracting the meat.

I am wondering whether it is possible for fish to smell anything that is out of the water. Sea-crabs certainly have that faculty, as a very large one was

seen one day to come out of the sea, and to climb over the wall of the aquarium in order to seize a large piece of conch which was out of its sight on the floor of the cabana and more than a yard away.

One would not expect crabs to show much intelligence and certainly not to be capable of working in partnership to build a home. And yet an observation which I made in Mauritius of the activities of a couple of crabs seemed to me to be striking evidence of intelligent co-operation of work for a definite object. The crabs were very small ones, pale grey in colour, and about the size of a shilling. The water was not more than a foot deep, and was so clear that I was able to observe the antics of the little creatures as closely and distinctly as if they had been in the open air. My attention was attracted to them by noticing that they were excavating the sand from under a small flat stone which lay on the sandy surface. The stone was about an inch and a half square, and very thin. It may indeed have been a large flat piece of shell. As soon as a hole large enough to contain one of the crabs had been made, the creature went into it and vigorously dug out more sand. The one outside, with its large claws, scraped away the *debris* so as to prevent its falling back into the hole. Now and again a small stone, sometimes the size of a large pea or even bigger, would be thrown out; and to my surprise I would see the partner take hold of these stones and deliberately place them on the top of the roof. It did it in such a way that they would not fall back into the hole below, and it seemed to me that a human being could hardly have



shown more intelligence than did this diminutive crab in executing this work. It was wonderful to see the workmanlike way in which this little creature would lay hold of a small stone as soon as it appeared outside, and would turn and twist it about until it

found that it could conveniently carry it up the slope leading to the roof.

I watched this performance for more than half an hour; and at the end of that time the excavation appeared to have been completed to the satisfaction of the builders, and the two little partners retreated into it. I noticed that the slope in front of the opening had been made very smooth, and it is probable that its purpose may have been to cause some edible creature to slide down it and thus to provide a meal for the tenants of the hole. I believe that this is a dodge used by a certain kind of ground spider.

I wish I could have made further observations of the habits of these two little crabs, but unfortunately that evening we had a very high and rough tide, and next morning, when I went to look at the place, I found to my disappointment that the little home so carefully constructed had been completely obliterated.

While on the subject of crabs, I remember that when I was visiting the wonderful aquarium at Naples, some years ago, I noticed the unusual behaviour of a small crab which appeared to me to be giving evidence of possessing the last thing that one would expect to find in a crab—I mean the spirit of fun. This particular little crab was in a compartment occupied by various kinds of small fish. My attention to it was attracted by the fact that it was lying on its back on the gravel, and that it was kicking about an almost perfectly round stone of a dull red colour. It kicked the thing about up and down and from side to side with its six legs, and I was obliged to come to the conclusion that it was having a game by itself. It continued to do this

for more than a minute, and once when the stone fell down it quickly picked it up again and resumed its play. This incident impressed me very much, as it appeared to show that this young crab—for it was a very small one—possibly had the same feelings which induce a kitten or a puppy to play with a ball. And why not?

In this connection I might say that, while I have never noticed my trigger fish playing at any game, one of them certainly showed that it had a spirit of what seemed to be mischief. A friend and I were once sitting in my cabana, and were interested in observing the movements of a couple of star fish which had that morning been placed in the pool. One of them was about seven inches across, but the other was a good deal smaller. This one was of a rather unusual colour, and while we were looking at it we noticed that the trigger fish, a fellow about six inches long, was nosing around it. Presently the fish thrust its snout under one of the radii of the star fish and continued to do so until it succeeded in turning the creature on to its back. My friend, using his walking-stick, replaced the star fish into proper position. A moment later the trigger fish returned and repeated its performance. A second time my friend replaced the star fish, and again the trigger fish came back to the attack and then, stationing itself about a foot away, appeared to be waiting to see what the man would do next. It seemed to show that the fish's object was either to amuse itself or to annoy the star fish. There is nothing edible about the horny exterior of a star fish—even for a voracious trigger fish.

ON this lovely March afternoon, with a soft breeze blowing from the north-east and a blue sky flecked with little fleecy white clouds, there could be no doubt about the pleasantness of my surroundings here in Nassau. A channel of deep blue water, about a mile wide, flows between our shore and the long, low coral islet, which is covered by tall casuarina trees and palms. The white sails of a couple of fishing craft and of a small yacht are giving just the right touch of movement to the placid, cerulean waters spreading away before me. Though thousands of miles away carnage and conflagration are ravaging God's earth it is still good to be in the world.

It is rather a pity that the pretty shore opposite should be afflicted by the prosaic name of Hog Island. There are numbers of islets in the West Indies where the same name may be found, and it doubtless came from the Buccaneers who used to deposit on various uninhabited small islands in the West Indies a number of pigs. These animals would increase and multiply and thus provide a supply of fresh meat for the rovers when they revisited the places to conceal in them the loot that they had accumulated in their voyages. It is therefore probable that the island facing us, instead of being the scene of several beautiful winter homes, as it is at present, was originally used for that purpose.

There have been more explanations than one of the origin of the name Buccaneer; but I think that

the one generally accepted is that it came from a French word *Boucanier* used in the French West Indies in the eighteenth century. When these pirates visited one of their hiding-places to procure fresh meat, they killed a number of wild hogs and smoke dried the meat. This was done by making heaps of semi-dried chunks of wood, which in the French language were called *Boucans*.

Up to the time that the British and American Governments finally decided on the site of the land-fall of Columbus, there were two islands of the Bahamas which disputed the claim. One was Watling Island, subsequently renamed San Salvador, and the other was Cat Island, about sixty miles farther north-west. In the late 'eighties the colony possessed a very able and distinguished Governor, Sir Henry Blake, who, with his clever wife, interested himself very much in this question.

The job of administering the government of the Bahamas in those days was far from exhausting and Sir Henry found that he had plenty of time on his hands. So he and his spouse decided to see what they could do in settling the conflicting claims of the two islands. They chartered one of the small Bahamian schooners which were usually engaged in collecting the sponges for which the Bahamas were noted, and fitted it out for a cruise of some weeks.

They also provided themselves with a copy of the log which Columbus kept on his wonderful voyage of discovery and so arranged the course of their voyage, going eastward from Nassau, as to arrive at a point of latitude and longitude in the Atlantic which on the same day, October 10, 1492, Columbus



had recorded. It was the day on which he had decided to allow his ship to drift westward, impelled by winds and currents. The Blakes thought that by doing the same thing their little ship, which was about the same size as the *Santa Maria*, might find the same winds and currents as Columbus did, and that it might drift westward in the same direction, and so reach the same island as Columbus did.

All happened as arranged. The Blakes soon noted the floating seaweed, the driftwood and the flight of the migratory birds, just as Columbus did, and soon came upon a low-lying island, now known as Cat Island. The Blakes thus became strong partisans of the claim of that island to be the scene of the first connection between the Old and the New World. In 1890 a German named Rudolf Cronau made another test in much the same way as the Blakes had done and found himself landing on another island, known then as Watling Island, which is about sixty miles to the south-east of Cat Island. The distinguished international Committee which subsequently thoroughly investigated the matter came to a definite conclusion and it is now generally accepted that the island of Watling, now called San Salvador, is the disputed spot.

Columbus also discovered several islands in the neighbourhood of San Salvador and gave names to several. Upon one he bestowed the beautiful and poetic name of Santa Maria de la Concepcion. A succeeding and more prosaic generation, typical of modern times, altered this to Rum Cay!

OF all the horrid insects that pervade the tropics and the semi-tropics the tick is, I think, one of the most disgusting. It infests all animals, and to keep one's dog from being worried by them is in this island quite a job each morning. The West Indian tick is a very small creature and in shape much resembles a crab. Before taking its meal of blood it is about the size of a small "o" in print, but when it has had its fill it may attain the size of a pea. The amount of blood, therefore, that can be extracted from a small animal by these vermin may be considerable.

It was my good fortune in 1896 to visit the beautiful island of Jamaica and to spend a fortnight at Government House with Sir Henry and Lady Blake. The first evening I was shown up to my bedroom by the Private Secretary, Lord George Fitz-Gerald—a very delightful person by the way. On the dressing-table I was surprised to see a saucer with some oil and a feather in it. "What on earth is this for?" I asked. "Oh," replied Lord George, "that's for the ticks. They are a terrible pest here. Lady Blake probably took you this afternoon for her beloved drive up the Bog Walk, and if, as I expect, she asked you to get out of the carriage to pick some of her favourite maiden-hair fern on the bank of the road you will, when you undress, presently find several ticks sticking to your legs. You must not pull them out, because their head will come off and remain in

the skin, and may then produce nasty sores. But if you use the feather, with a drop of oil on it, they will fall off harmlessly."

And so it proved to be. I found five of the disgusting creatures busily absorbing my precious blood. While I was dressing, Lord George told me that the tick infestation of Jamaica had become a very serious problem for the colony. Very great numbers of young calves and lambs and even adult animals were dying from their attacks. Their ears and nostrils would become clogged by masses of ticks, and the degree of suffering caused must have been great. All measures that had been tried for the suppression of the ticks had proved futile, and the matter had become so serious that the Government was offering a prize of some thousands of pounds for a remedy.

The disaster had been due to an unfortunate step taken by the Government some years previously. The sugar cane planters had represented that owing to a great increase in the number of rats which gnawed the ripening canes, their crops were being seriously diminished. In order to cope with the situation and to destroy the rats the Government imported from India a considerable number of mongoose, which are known to be the deadly enemies of rodents. This measure was successful up to a certain point, and the number of rats was considerably diminished.

Unfortunately, conditions in Jamaica were apparently very favourable to the mongoose and they bred prodigiously. Their inroads on the rats had been so successful that food in that line had become

inadequate. The new-comers therefore had to forage in other directions and they attacked all kinds of young birds in nests as well as eggs to such a degree that insect-eating birds became very scarce. The mongoose also devoured the lizards and other small



creatures which feed principally on ticks. The latter, consequently, soon took the upper hand, and increased and multiplied to such an extent as to produce the serious situation that prevailed at the time of my visit to Jamaica.

This, of course, was a striking illustration of the danger of upsetting the "Balance of Nature." It was not until some years later that Nature herself started

to remedy the mistake that human beings had made. The mongoose, finding inadequate sustenance, began to die off rapidly, and great numbers of their bodies were found covered with ticks. In a measure as the number of mongoose decreased, so did the number of birds, lizards and other tick-eating creatures increase. But many years had to pass before the normal balance had been restored, while the total cost to the colony had been very great.

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THE number of books written during the past centuries about the West Indian islands and still surviving is disappointingly meagre, and most of them are the works of Spanish and French Catholic missionaries who laboured in the islands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The best known of them are by Oviedo, Peter Martyr du Tertre and Père Labat. There must, of course, be many more accounts in the ecclesiastical libraries of Spain and Portugal. Of the works that I have come across by far the most interesting is the important book by Père Labat entitled *Nouveau Voyage Aux Isles d'Amerique*, published in 1712. This worthy missionary dealt principally with the French islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe and must have been a cheerful and humorous soul. His book is full of interesting anec-

dotes and his descriptions of the Yellow Caribs who peopled the lesser Carribean islands in his day are among the most valuable now in existence. He was also much interested in the manners and customs of the African slaves on the plantations and was evidently not a little impressed by the mysterious effects of the practices of Fetishism which those people had brought with them from the coast of Guinea.

The Obeah man of his day seems to have worked with poisons on a scale which happily is very far from being practised nowadays. Père Labat gives an instance of wholesale poisoning by an African slave on a plantation in Martinique. He relates how an African, being on the point of death, sent for his master and *confessed himself guilty of the deaths of more than thirty slaves who had died from an unaccountable disease on the estate during the previous two years.* He explained that to attain his ends he used to obtain the juice of a certain plant found commonly on the shores of the island. He always kept the nail of one of his fingers longer than the others and when intending to poison anyone would scrape the bark of the plant in question with it until a certain quantity of the deadly juice had collected beneath it. Then, returning home, he would invite his victim to have a drink of rum with him. Drinking first out of the calabash he would, before handing it to his victim, allow the long finger-nail to soak for an instant in the liquor. The poison was so deadly that scarce two hours would elapse before the unfortunate man would be writhing in terrible convulsions and death would ensue very shortly.

On being asked if there was any antidote to this

dreadful poison the man replied that it would be found in the root of the thorny Sensitive Plant, pounded and moistened with wine. Père Labat's experience of the working of this antidote is too curious to be omitted. He said that he was once called, in December, 1696, to hear the last confession of a slave who was apparently dying from poison. He determined as a last resource to try the antidote which had been indicated by the poisoner. The root having been scraped, stripped of its brown skin washed and dried, was then placed in a mortar and reduced to a paste of which as much was taken as would cover a small coin. This was then moistened with red wine poured on it by degrees. When the paste had been thoroughly dissolved in the wine, it was administered to the patient—a good glassful. The man was placed on a mattress on the ground between two fires and carefully covered up. In a very short time the remedy began to act by provoking an intense perspiration and very severe convulsions accompanied by such violent retching as made one fear that the man would bring up some of his intestines. "In the midst of this," the good father says, "he brought up an animal of the thickness of a man's thumb, about four inches long, having four legs each an inch in length, furnished with three joints and terminating in little claws like those of a rat. The head was only distinguishable from the rest of the body by the movements of the neck. It had two minute eyes, and a mouth armed with teeth. The back was furnished with two wings in shape and texture resembling those of a bat, and the rest of the body was covered with short, sparse, bristly red hair. The patient threw up

a good deal of blood and some blue matter after ejecting the insect and then fell in a dead faint which lasted a long time. A moment after having been ejected the creature began to move its wings and hopped off the table on which it had been placed but, on attempting to fly, fell to the ground. It was placed in a bottle of spirits and preserved. It seems to me," concluded Père Labat, "that it would require a lengthened period to allow poison to breed a similar corruption in the body of a man."

As this was written by a reverend Father who, judging by his book, must have been a veracious person, we are bound to believe that he was not romancing and must swallow those extraordinary effects of what must certainly be a very violent poison. Oddly enough, I have recently come across, in my file of *Strange Happenings*, a note to the effect that some years ago a magistrate in British Honduras officially reported to the Governor that a woman in his district had given birth to a frog. The Governor referred the report to the Principal Medical Officer, who returned the paper with a Minute saying: "This case is evidently an instance of the lamentable indiscretions of some frog who would a-wooing go!"

In the same file I have also found a cutting from the *New York Sun*, which shows that the Honduras magistrate may perhaps have had good grounds for his official report. The American paper stated that "Mrs. C. Burtis, of Hopewell Junction, New York, had been suffering for a long time from a mysterious pain in her stomach. It was finally decided that an operation for appendicitis would be advisable and she was taken to the Williamsburg Hospital. The



operation was performed and it revealed that she was not suffering from appendicitis, but the surgeon discovered and removed from her stomach a live frog said to be five inches long. "It is supposed," says the paper, "that she swallowed the frog when it was very small while she was drinking water." So the good Père Labat may not have been guilty of a "tall story" after all.

In some pages farther back I referred to the Obeah bottles which are such a subject of dread to superstitious negroes in the West Indies, but when we think of the lot of absurd ideas which many of us have concerning luck and the reverse, I wonder if we have much right to laugh at the simple coloured person.

The Obeah bottles, by the way, are first cousins to the old "Witchpots" that are sometimes still found under the threshold of ancient cottages in Dorset and Devonshire in old England. They are also not as harmless as they may be thought to be. They were probably placed there with evil intent and have been found filled with the same weird paraphernalia as are used by the West Indian sorcerers. Susceptibility to suggestion or autosuggestion and the knowledge that a spell, intended to injure, has been set in motion may often result in great harm to health and even in death.

A person, living alone in his little shanty, finding one of these dreaded Obeah bottles hanging to the thatch of his hut, may conjure up all sorts of dreadful possibilities. He has so often heard of the dire effects of an Obeah spell that he becomes full of fear and

anxiety. He may soon begin to imagine that he already feels the premonitory symptoms of a mysterious illness; he thinks he has pains in his stomach and throbbings in various parts of his body, he loses his appetite and a few days later takes to his bed. If he has the money wherewith to buy a counter spell—as old Moses told me—all may yet be well, but otherwise he may really become seriously ill and die from sheer autosuggestion.

Primitive African negroes in some cases appear to have the faculty of dying at will. I was told that during the Egyptian expedition to Khartoum, sent to relieve the heroic General Gordon, a considerable number of natives of the Kru coast in Liberia who were noted for their great capacity as canoe men were recruited and sent to paddle the large boats that carried the troops up the Nile.

These Kru men are extremely devoted to their country and detest leaving it even for the short period during which they engage themselves as stokers and deckhands on the ships that ply on the west coast of Africa. I was told by an officer who served in that expedition that for some weeks the Kru men worked lustily and seemed to be in perfect health, but gradually they seemed to become sad and despondent and complained that if they were not soon sent back to their own country they would surely die.

It really happened as they had said. Gradually, without any apparent sign of illness, the men would one by one leave their paddles in a state of complete exhaustion, and saying in their simple pidgin English: "We go lib for we country!" would throw themselves into the bottom of the boat. In a few hours, after

vain efforts to revive them, the unfortunate negroes would be found to have quietly expired.

I remember another instance of this strange faculty that came to my knowledge when I was administering the government of Northern Nigeria. We had been obliged to send a small punitive expedition against a tribe of wild cannibal natives inhabiting the Benue province. They had been killing some peaceful traders who had ventured into their country.

Some forty prisoners were taken and lodged in a prison at Minna, a town not far from headquarters. Some weeks later the officer in charge of the district reported a great and steady mortality among the prisoners. The Medical Officer, who treated the men, was of the opinion that the savages were dying apparently of their own volition. It is needless to say that I ordered the immediate release of the survivors and their return to their native wilds.

## ★ 19 ★

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THIS is one of those perfect mornings that make one think that during the winter months the climate of Nassau is the most delightful in the world. Except in March there is very little wind and the atmosphere is usually clear and exhilarating. The sun shines almost continuously and the temperature rarely rises above

80°. Singing birds are not numerous, but there is ample compensation in the number of delightful mocking birds whose lovely notes fill the morning and evening hours.

Not far from my aquarium is a small bathing beach almost entirely frequented by the local people of the working class, and my attention just now is being divided between observations of the fish in my pool and the antics of a lot of coloured folk who are disporting themselves in the clear blue water. One of these people is, I think, one of the largest darkey ladies that I have ever beheld. I have said "one" because, when I was in Uganda, it was my privilege to see many extremely obese members of the fair sex in what used to be "Darkest Africa."

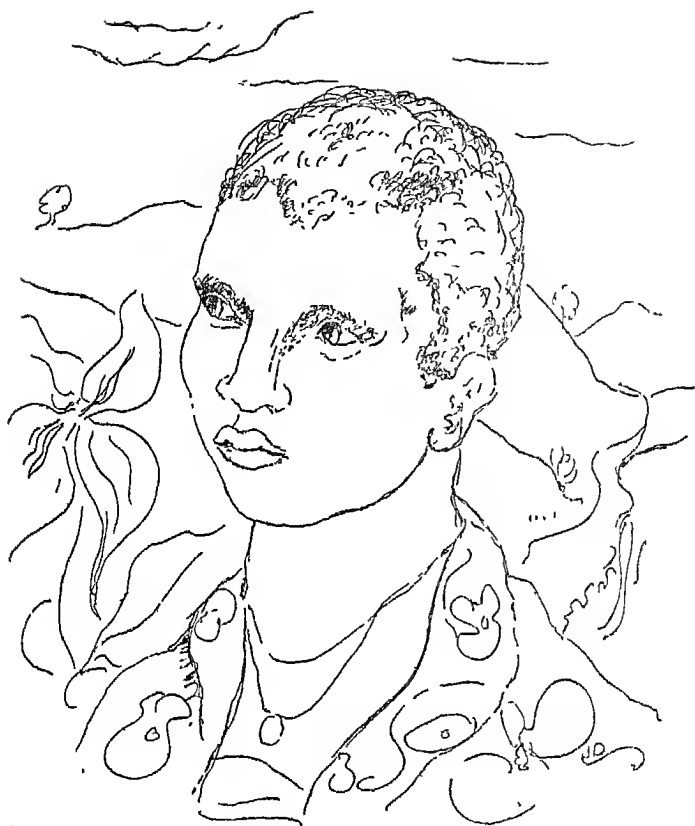
The queen of them all was a lady of royal rank, to wit, the consort of the King of Ankole in Uganda. I was visiting officially that part of the Protectorate and had arrived at the capital, 'Mbarara. The King, Kahaya by name, was a veritable giant; he was six feet eight inches tall, and his handsome long robes seemed to add several more inches to his stature. After having presented his principal chiefs to me and given me an account of the affairs of his kingdom he invited me to partake of some refreshments in his "palace."

This palace was mainly composed of a large number of enclosures, surrounded by high palisades of plaited reeds, each of them containing a native building of considerable size. The work of the missionaries, Anglican and Roman Catholic, had made much progress in that part of Uganda, and a considerable portion of the people of Ankole had embraced

Christianity. The King himself was a Protestant and, I was told, limited himself to one wife.

On my expressing a desire to visit the lady I was taken through a number of enclosures in which were a lot of people belonging to the "Court," and presently arrived at the place in which the royal lady was taking the air. I found her lying on an embroidered grass mat, and it seemed difficult at first sight to believe that she was really a human being. To say that she was colossal is quite inadequate. It appeared that she had not expected me and was therefore very much *en désabillé*. Sprawling over the mat she seemed to overflow in all directions, and gave me the impression of a gigantic chocolate mould that had gone soft! She must have weighed at least four hundred pounds and the curves and convolutions that she exhibited were phenomenal. The lady made some futile attempts to rise from her couch in order to greet the Governor but, seeing how difficult and possibly painful was the process, I begged her to remain recumbent. King Kahaya informed me that her name was Vi-ki-to-ria and that she had been so named after our great queen.

The people of Ankole are known as Bahima and are said to have come originally from some part of Africa farther north, and probably from Abyssinia. They are very black but their features are usually more delicate than those of the surrounding natives of Uganda. In my time, except in the case of the chiefs, they wore very few clothes. The men are nearly always very tall and slim, while the women tried to be as fat as possible. Cattle-raising is the great industry of the country and the herds possessed by



these people are enormous. The beasts are remarkable for the immense spread of their horns, a width of five feet between the tips not being uncommon. A herd of these great horned cattle is a remarkable sight.

The whole population lives almost entirely on milk, of which the women are said to consume vast quan-

tities. When I saw her the Queen was wearing, slung around her neck, a large leather bag probably containing a couple of quarts. The bag had a small tube attached to it and, even while I was with her, the august lady took several sucks at it. I was told that this is a universal practice among the women of Ankole. They take small sips of milk almost all the time that they are not asleep and these constant sips account for their obesity. I have been told that milk taken in large draughts is often not easy of digestion, but that small and almost continuous quantities are on the contrary the right way to drink milk. The ladies of Ankole probably learnt this ages ago.

★ 20 ★

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THERE are probably not many men still alive who have had in their employ people who were once African slaves, but I happen to be one of them.

In the days, now more than fifty years ago, when I held the position of Receiver-General of this island, I built myself a rather charming house on the western shore. I employed in my garden two very old negroes, a man and his wife. They both spoke very broken English and, among themselves, talked in some West African language. As I had for some years been stationed on the coast of Guinea I was able to pick

out some of their words and to understand them better than most people would have done.

During their work I used sometimes to talk to them and they told me their story. The abolition of slavery was decreed in Britain in 1834 and freedom was conferred on all the slaves then living in captivity in the British West Indies. But in the great islands, such as Cuba, San Domingo and other Spanish possessions in the West Indies, the case was different. Slavery continued to exist there, and for a considerable number of years subsequent to 1834 Spanish ships carrying cargoes of slaves crossed the Atlantic at frequent intervals, bringing negroes bought or captured in West Africa.

Our government did its best to stamp out this nefarious trade and our cruisers patrolled the route usually taken by the slavers and would pounce upon them. The ships were usually captured in the vicinity of the islands and the prizes would be brought in to the nearest British colony.

Old Mokombo told me that he was one of those thus captured and with about 300 other negroes had been brought to Nassau. After arrival there these people appeared to have been divided up into lots and indentured to the white inhabitants. I do not know how long those indentures lasted or what wages, if any, the people earned, but I do not think that the people concerned could have appreciated very clearly the difference between their lot in Nassau and what it might have been, as slaves, in Cuba or San Domingo.

However deplorable may have been the transfer, in the bonds of slavery, of enormous numbers of West



African negroes to the islands of the West Atlantic, there can be no doubt about the benefits from the physical point of view that have accrued to them through their enforced migration. Mokombo was very vague as to the part of Africa from which he came. He and his wife were extremely diminutive people and were barely five feet high. Their features were also extremely uncouth. Such characteristics are to be found among many of the tribes inhabiting the Congo region and I think that they probably came from that part. They had raised a number of children and grand-children since their arrival in Nassau, and I was much impressed by the extraordinary improvement that had occurred in the physique of these people.

The first generation born in Nassau were fine upstanding specimens of humanity and at least half a head taller than their parents. The third generation had made even greater progress in breadth and stature, and what was even more interesting was the improvement in the features of their faces. The huge lips of their grandparents had become reduced to reasonable proportions, and even the squat, flat noses had become almost pleasing in shape. This improvement cannot have been caused by any admixture of white blood, as these people were noticeable for the fine lustrous, nearly blue-black tone of their complexion, which is sometimes almost beautiful. There can be no doubt that the notable physical improvement of these folk must have been due, to a great extent, to the fine climatic conditions, good food, and general amenities which they found in this British Colony. Had the original couple remained in their

forest homes in the Congo, their progeny to-day would probably be as short and unsightly as their ancestors were.

When I was administering the government of Uganda I had occasion to visit, early in 1898, the region bordering on the Congo territory, where large numbers of Pygmies were to be found. Most of those I saw were not much more than three feet tall and they appeared to belong to one of the most primitive types of humanity. They showed few signs of progress and their habitations were of very rudimentary nature. They wore no clothing and their chief ornaments were rough skewers of iron thrust through their cheeks. I was told that they were great hunters and especially fearless in their attacks on the huge elephants which share the dense forests with them.

A Colonel Harrison obtained permission to take away to England with him some of these little pygmies and, I believe, they proved to be a very paying proposition. He exhibited them in a great number of places and they excited much attention. The little people were with him in Europe for three years and, when Colonel Harrison passed through Uganda, on his way to restore them to their homes, he brought them up to Government House to see me.

Three years in the healthy climate of Europe and an abundance of good food had done wonders for these pygmies and, although they were all adults, probably varying between 20 and 30 years of age, each of them had added from two to three inches to his or her stature. They had also improved physically in other ways and had become practically civilized people. I cannot think, however, that their

manners had improved very much, as they appeared to me to be very impudent in their demeanour and to have no small conceit of themselves. This also was a result of contact with civilization. One little woman, the eldest of the group, was rigged out in a long stiff black silk dress, and on her diminutive bosom she displayed a large locket and chain of questionable gold. I personally seemed to have impressed her very unfavourably, as she persistently turned her back on me during the whole interview and only evinced satisfaction when saying good-bye.

I have often wondered how long the result of their contact with the manners and customs of white people lasted after their return to their forest home. It is quite possible that their superior tone may have aggravated their families to such a degree that they finally formed the principal dish at tribal feasts, most of the pygmies being arrant cannibals.

There are, unfortunately, a number of people who, coming from northern countries, are ignorant of the pain and offence which are given to worthy and respectable coloured folk by referring to them as "niggers." I have often felt great sympathy for my admirable coloured butler and other servants when a stranger, recently arrived from England or the States, has at table used this offensive term. Most of them did so in ignorance of the opprobrium attaching to the term, which some generations ago was always applied to slaves.

ONE of the most strange and interesting of the fish in my aquarium is known as the box or trunk fish. It is of peculiar shape and, instead of the usual soft, elongated form of a fish, its skin is stretched tightly over a bony box of triangular shape. Through a hole at one end it protrudes a fleshy, pig-like head, while a large fan-shaped tail and fins issue from other orifices in the box. The one that I am now looking at is of a rather dull grey colour with irregular black blotches, but other specimens may show us a greater variety of coloration.

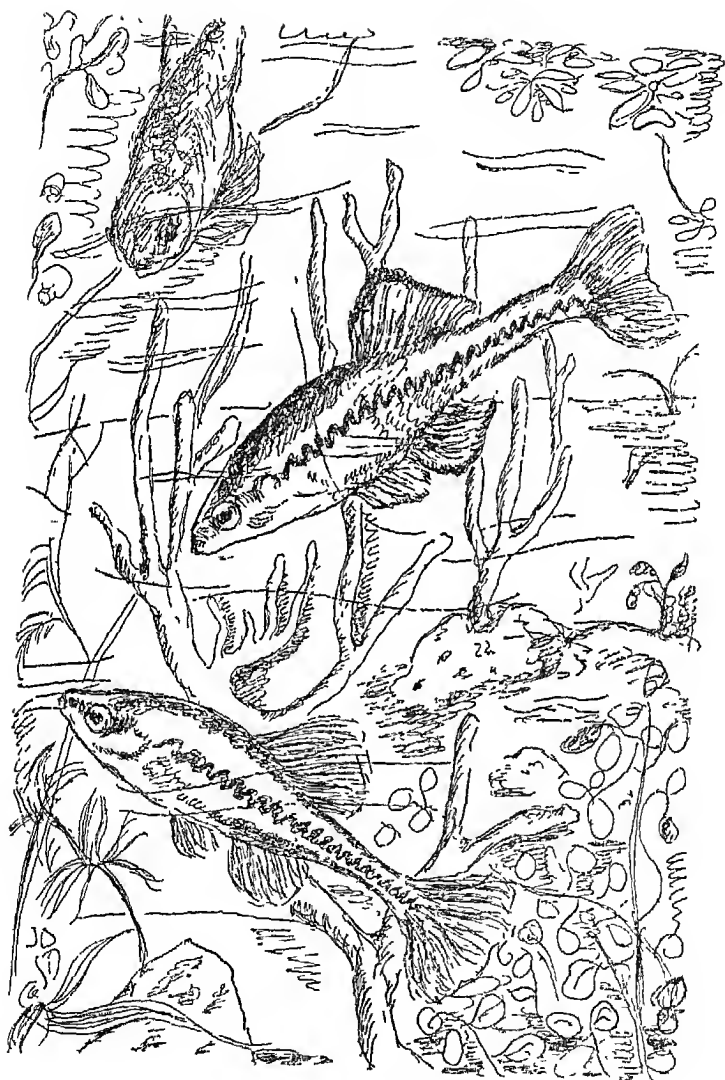
I am particularly interested in this kind of fish because it shows what appears to be a special and remarkable degree of intelligence. Very soon after its entry into the aquarium, the first specimen that I had used to come up frequently to observe me very persistently. It would come right up to the step on which I sat and would remain there for several seconds. It was evidently taking careful stock of me. A few days later it began to spit water at me. This was evidently done to attract my attention. In order to encourage it in this performance I always rewarded it by a bit of food. This behaviour, I think, certainly put the fish on the same plane, as regards intelligence, as land animals or birds which ask for food in a definite manner. But the surprising thing is that, while animals are accustomed to human beings and know a great deal about them, this fish, which only a few days before had only the slightest knowledge,

if any, of the appearance and ways of human beings, should so quickly come to the conclusion that a person is a purveyor of food and that, in order to attract his or her attention, it has to perform a special act which in most cases must be entirely unusual to the habits of the fish.

Another bit of evidence of intelligence on the part of my fish is the fact that several of the other kinds of fish in the aquarium very soon followed the example of the box fish. A fine large parrot fish was the first to adopt the trick and it became a great performer. It seemed to know me perfectly well and when it was particularly hungry would almost leap out of the water in its rush towards me. While doing so it might spit vigorously three or four times on its way. The blue fish and trigger fish also have quickly adopted the practice and one, a beautiful Scotch porgy, did it after only three days in the aquarium.

Some weeks ago I wrote to the Director of the Natural History Museum in New York asking whether this practice of spitting by fish was known to science. He kindly replied at some length and told me that it had often been observed, notably in the case of a fish, *Toxotes jaculator*, which "normally dislodges insects from over-hanging leaves by ejecting drops of water at them."

I am sure that Dr. Breder is correct, but I am wondering too whether this ejaculation of water, which many fish seem to be able to perform, may not be used also for some other purpose. I have noticed sometimes that a fish, making a rearward movement, seems to disturb the water under the surface immediately in front of its snout. It is perhaps



possible that the violent expulsion of water from its mouth may help the creature to move backwards, and we may possibly find that our friends the fish have forestalled the knowledge of the principle on which the creator of the jet-plane based his great invention!

Just now I was looking over the wall of the aquarium and noticed in the water outside a shoal of very small fish closely packed together, as is the usual custom of "fry." I was struck by the amazing uniformity of their movements. Though they must have numbered many hundreds, they did not occupy a space larger than would be covered by a handkerchief, and they formed an almost perfectly square phalanx.

What particularly interested me was the precision and completely harmonious movements of this little shoal. The fish would suddenly turn and swerve from one direction to another with the precise unison of a military evolution. This must, of course, have been noticed many times by people living near the seaside and some, like myself, must have asked themselves whether these tiny creatures do not possess some mysterious means of mental communication. I found myself wondering whether fish do not possess a kind of telepathic method of communication, which enables a shoal, such as I am now watching, to obey *en masse* the regulation of its movements. I read somewhere, some years ago, that our splendid London policemen had been furnished with wireless receiving-sets in their helmets. Is it possible that Scotland Yard had been forestalled by the fish!

Save for a few words that I wrote some days ago

I don't think that I have so far said anything about the kind of food that my fishy pets are given in the aquarium. Unfortunately it would be very difficult to give them the varieties to which they are accustomed, especially as regards the sorts of sea-weeds and small creatures that they can find in their natural haunts. A few of them evidently like bits of bread, but far more prefer almost any kind of fish flesh and are especially fond of conch meat. The supply of this is fortunately abundant and very cheap.

These conchs are one of the principal items of food of the coloured folk, and indeed it is highly esteemed by many white people. The conch is an immense shell fish of the mollusc family which is extremely plentiful in Bahamian waters, and many specimens of this magnificent shell are often to be found serving as decorations in the humbler homes in northern countries. The conch, in fact, is such an important creature that it has given its name to that most fascinating department of scientific study known as Conchology.

My fish always get their daily meal between four and five o'clock in the afternoon, and I have already referred in this connection to what seems to be their possession of a sense of time. Several of the more *intelligent varieties* such as the *trigger fish*, the *sand fish*, the *box fish* and the *porcupine* will always be found at the appointed hour evidently waiting for me or for my servant. On our appearance they show excitement, and especially when my man pulls a conch shell out of the pool and breaks it up. They evidently understand clearly what he is doing and by their rapid movements to and fro remind one of



the impatience shown in the same way by the lions and tigers in a zoo when their food is being brought near to their cages.

The conch is not only excellent food but also sometimes provides pearls of price known as "Pink Pearls." Fashion seems, however, to have become tired of them and in recent years their value has greatly decreased. The conch, in producing its pearl, works in much the same way as does the oyster. When a foreign body, such as a grain of sand or other substance, intrudes into the interior of the conch and cannot be expelled, the creature proceeds gradually to envelop it in layers of beautiful pink nacre and thus forms a pearl. The process probably takes a long time.

During my previous residence in Nassau in bygone days I was told an interesting story in this connection by a jeweller who was one of the chief buyers of pink pearls. He showed me a lovely collection of them and pointed out the reasons for their varying values. He placed two rather small ones on his counter and, though I could not see much difference between them, he said that while one was only worth five pounds the other was valued at four times as much. He explained that the great difference in price was due to the fact that one of them possessed a quality which was lacking in the other. This was known as "watering" and he drew my attention to a remarkably beautiful iridescence that could be seen in the better one but was lacking in the other. This iridescence lay just under the surface and shimmered like watered silk.

He told me an interesting story in this connection. He said that some months before my visit a negro

fisherman had brought him three pink pearls of unusual beauty and shape. The Bahamian pearls are very seldom perfectly round but are usually oval, and he was surprised to see how perfectly spherical were the three presented to him. After a good deal of haggling he secured them for twenty pounds and sent them by post to a great dealer in pearls in New York. Some weeks later he received a letter from the firm stating that there was evidently something wrong with them, as one of them showed signs of cracking. A fortnight later the pearls were returned to him and one of them showed that it had split right open. Its core was then seen to be composed of a pill of cement.

The man was prosecuted and confessed that, after placing a large number of live conchs in an enclosed area of seawater, he had inserted as deeply as possible into the interior of each fish one of these cement pellets. Some months later, on breaking open a number of the shells, he found that in several cases the conchs had produced pearls. It is sad to relate that this enterprising forerunner of the great Japanese artificial pearl industry was rewarded for his ingenuity by a substantial term of imprisonment.

Certainly the most sedate of all the denizens of my aquarium are the star fish, and their lives seem to be the acme of placidity. Their movements are so slow as to be almost imperceptible, but I have found that they are capable of covering about a yard in ten minutes. Possibly they may be able to do a sprint in quicker time, but I have never seen one that appeared to be in a hurry.

Their movements are made by contracting and

expanding a multitude of small, tube-like feet on their under-surface, and, besides travelling over sand or flat rock, a star fish can also easily ascend a wall or other smooth, perpendicular surface. This it does by an intricate system of muscular suction arrangement that enables it to squirt water through its feet and so provide a kind of motive power. The mouth is in the centre of the star-shaped under-surface and may be said to consist of five triangular lips which are capable of sucking food into the orifice. So far as I have been able to notice, all is fish that comes into the star fish's net and it is a great scavenger. While it mainly sucks up the tiny creatures that it finds in the sand I have also seen it astride of a good sized dead fish and evidently making a hearty and almost rapid meal off it. It is indeed such a greedy creature that, not satisfied with merely protruding its five lips, when coming across an usually large and succulent morsel it, according to Sir Arthur Thompson, "protrudes its elastic stomach" over the delicacy. I can hear a paunchy *gourmet* exhaling a sigh of envy over this faculty.

The star fish are quite decorative and vary much in size and colour. Those in the pool are of the usual pincushion shape and are five-pointed. One of them, of a bright yellow, is not more than two inches across while another, that is a brilliant scarlet and covered with tiny, horny protuberances, has a diameter of about nine inches. Though Nature may not have been over generous to star fish in the matter of locomotion, I have read that she has endowed this creature with no less than five pairs of reproductive organs!



I can't help feeling considerable respect for the humble star fish, as it possesses powers which are certainly beyond the capacity of even the greatest human scientist. It is able to reproduce perfectly a missing limb. If by accident, such as the fall of a heavy stone on one of its arms, that portion of its anatomy becomes hopelessly crushed, the creature is able, by a long process of twisting and turning, to detach the maimed portion and gradually to replace it by another member. This remarkable capacity is, as most people know, shared by crabs, lizards, worms and some other creatures, but scientists declare that, as star fish possess neither nerve centres, ganglia nor brains, the process in their case must be automatic and not of the same nature as the act of the crab or of the lizard, which deliberately tears off a leg or a tail in order to escape capture. In the face of this scientific dictum as to the absence of volition through brain action, I am tempted to relate an observation that I made some weeks ago, which, on the contrary, appeared to show a definite determination of action on the part of one of my star fish.

I was sitting in this cabana and noticed that a large red star fish, which was at the opposite end of the pool, was on the move and coming in my direction. Its track was perfectly straight and progress was continuous. According to the note that I took at the time a period of about twenty-five minutes was required to cover a distance of about eight feet and the creature then encountered a piece of water-soaked board that was lying on the sand. It did not seem to like this and, moving sharply to the right, it followed the edge of the board for about three

feet, when it met a small block of concrete. It moved round this block and reached the opposite edge of the board, which it coasted until it got to the very spot at which it had been obliged to deviate from its original course. To my great surprise it then turned and continued its journey in my direction for about twenty inches when it stopped and settled itself on the sand. An examination of that spot showed no indication whatever of what may have caused the star fish to make that long and definite journey. The determination of the creature, in spite of difficulties and obstacles, to persevere in a single definite direction, showed, in my humble opinion, that in spite of the absence of brains and nerve centres, it must have possessed something that very nearly resembled those very useful organisms. I leave it to the scientific people to give the explanation of the star fish's apparent strength of will.

★ 22 ★

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JUST now, on my way down to the cabana, I stubbed my foot against a rather large stone that was jutting out into the path. In order to remove this obstacle I turned it over and found underneath it a medium-sized tarantula spider. This was not surprising, as those unpleasant creatures are not uncommon in this island; but what did surprise me was to see a

scorpion lying alongside of the spider. Both remained quiescent for a moment while I watched them, and I could see no sign that they were engaged in anything like combat, deadly enemies though they are supposed to be. As they soon began to show signs of scurrying away I ended their existence by placing my foot firmly upon them. I wish now that I had refrained from doing so in order that I might have found some explanation of their unusual association.

Poisonous insects and reptiles are to be found in almost all parts of the world, but it is an interesting fact that they are far more numerous in tropical lands than in the temperate regions of the earth. I wonder why that should be. Nature seems to be so much more vigorous where the sun shines most intensely and, while producing the most gorgeous colouring and many other refulgent beauties of nature, it also appears to be prodigal of specially virulent weapons of offence and defence.

When in northern countries I talk to friends about mosquitoes and sandflies, snakes and scorpions, tarantulas and centipedes and many other of the minor horrors of the tropics, people wonder how I can cheerfully live familiarly with such dreadful associates. But the truth is that, while these unpleasant creatures and reptiles certainly are found almost everywhere in sub-tropical lands, one very seldom, save in the case of mosquitoes and such-like small fry, comes into direct contact with them. It is the rarest thing in the West Indies and in the Bahamas, for instance, to see a snake of any kind. I suppose I have not seen a single centipede for a year or more and would probably have to pay a black urchin at

least half a crown for a good live specimen of a tarantula.

I happen, however, during a long experience of tropical lands, to have picked up a good deal of knowledge about the habits of scorpions and spiders and, now that I am comfortably settled in my usual cool, shady seat above the pool, I will jot down sundry remarks about those interesting but distinctly unlovable creatures.

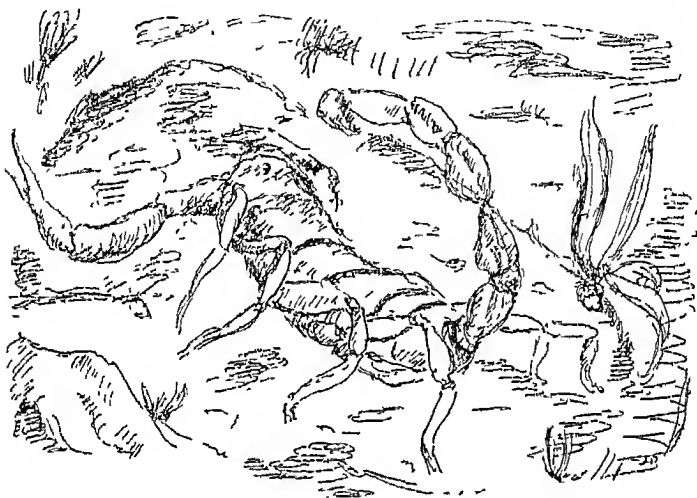
Many people have heard stories about the suicidal habits of scorpions when they find themselves in a situation from which they cannot escape. These accounts are usually treated with a good deal of scepticism, but I remember an old friend telling me that, when he was on the Gold Coast many years ago, he had definitely tested the matter. Having secured a scorpion of considerable size, he placed it on the ground in the centre of a circle of dried grass and leaves, to which he set fire. He told me that the scorpion, after perambulating round the burning circle and finding no exit, retreated to the centre. Raising its tail over its back, it deliberately struck at its head two or three times. Convulsions almost immediately followed and the creature apparently died in a very short time.

It is said that the bites of some kinds of scorpions found in the tropics sometimes cause death, but I think that such cases are rare. Be that as it may, negroes are much afraid of being bitten by one of these vermin and in some localities take strange and unusual precautions against an attack. A friend of mine, who had spent a considerable time in the wilds of Dutch Guiana, engaged in the fascinating pursuit



of seeking for diamonds and gold, assured me that the natives of that region, tribes of South American Indians, inoculate themselves against the sting of scorpions which were very poisonous and numerous in that region.

It was not a case of a cure, but my friend had been



assured by these people that no scorpion would attack any individual into whose blood a certain decoction of herbs and other things had been introduced. So persistent were the natives in their assertions that Maurice Blake, for that was my friend's name, who had more than once suffered from the sting of a scorpion, allowed himself to be treated by the medicine-man of the tribe. He insisted that it worked like a charm. His charming wife, who had

been out there with him, told me that she had seen him on several occasions put the matter to a test. He would place a particularly poisonous kind of scorpion, which he had captured, on the palm of his hand. The creature would at once raise its tail with the evident intention of striking but, after maintaining it half-way in the air, would gradually lower it and replace it in its normal horizontal position. During the remainder of the time that her husband was in that region he was never attacked by a scorpion.

This account interested me particularly and for the following reasons. During my time on the Gold Coast, in my early days, my official duties caused me to make many long and lonely journeys along the shores of that surf-bound coast and during one of those journeys I interested myself a good deal in the subjects of snakes and their habits. I suppose it would be difficult to find in any part of the tropical world a region where serpents of the most venomous kinds exist in such numbers. Black cobras and puff adders of large size are to be found almost everywhere, and yet I was surprised to learn that the number of deaths from snakebite among the natives was proportionately very small. I was assured by many primitive but intelligent natives, with whom I spoke on the subject, that the comparative paucity of deaths from snakebite was due to the fact that the great majority of the "bush" people were inoculated *against* snakebite, and that no serpent would attack anyone who had thus been treated. They asserted that a snake could *smell* any individual who had thus been protected and that it would treat him accordingly.

Nothing I could say about the absurdity of such a belief appeared to shake their conviction. They said that this precautionary inoculation had been known by their people from time immemorial and that it was adopted almost universally. On investigating the matter further I found that a considerable number of the porters who carried my baggage and the men who bore me on their heads, in the canvas hammock in which I travelled in those pre-motor days, bore unmistakable signs of a small operation. These consisted in most cases of the cicatrices of small criss-cross cuts in the skin between the big and second toes of each foot. I was told that the inoculation was usually repeated every two or three years. I think that the most remarkable thing about this matter is that we should find among the aborigines of two such widely separated localities as West Africa and South America a firm belief, not that the results of attacks of scorpions and snakes can be *cured*, but that they can be *prevented* by some sort of inoculation.

And now for a little chat about spiders. I happen to know a good deal about some kinds of spiders, and though I cannot say that they are likeable creatures I certainly have much respect for their remarkable performances and apparent intelligence. Spiders abound in tropical Africa and during my stay there I spent a good deal of my leisure in observing their habits and capacities. Highly interesting though they be, any intensive study of spiders is rather a discouraging matter, there being more than five thousand classified varieties of the *salticidae* species alone. I was, however, able to collect a fair

number of the commonest kinds and, by keeping them alive in small boxes covered by glass, was able to observe a good many of their very interesting performances. The walls of one of the rooms in the quarters that I occupied at Accra were almost covered by old cigar boxes hanging on them and containing specimens that were either laying eggs or trying to make small webs. My walks abroad in the evenings rarely ended without the capture of a more or less interesting specimen for my collection.

On one occasion I captured a very handsome spider which is very common on the west coast of Africa and in most parts of the tropical world. It was of considerable size and had an abdomen as large as a small marble. Its size and rotund body of brilliant silky black, crossed by a band of bright yellow, made it a very conspicuous object. Its web was composed of unusually strong silky threads and was generally suspended between bushes some distance apart. So strong and so admirably constructed were some of the webs that I observed that they were evidently able to deal effectively with any insects, even of considerable size, that might become enmeshed in them.

On one occasion I decided to try to test the length of silk thread which one of these spiders could produce at one time. I selected a particularly fine and vigorous specimen and placed it on its back on a grooved board in such a manner that it could not move its legs and so that the spinnerets were fully exposed. I then tickled the four tiny orifices with a feather and in a few seconds found that the spider had exuded four almost imperceptible strands of silk. These were

in a scientific work that they comprise several hundreds. The liquid matter in the interior of the spider hardens on exposure to the air and is exuded through these microscopic holes, and I believe I am correct in saying that the creature can, by joining the threads of each of the two, three or more spinnerets, produce a line of silk of varying thickness.

As many of my readers may know, it is not every spider that produces silk. Many of them, especially tropical varieties, do not make webs, but run down their game in the open. One notable instance is the large spider nearly always to be found in a tropical house, and as it wages constant war on cockroaches and other noxious pests it is a friend of the house-keeper. This spider has a large, flat, round body, sometimes as wide as a penny, and its long legs enable it to pursue its prey at great speed. It is a misanthropic creature and fights and devours on sight other members of the same species. I remember on one occasion placing two of these spiders in a shallow box that had a glass cover. Each at once retreated to the furthestmost ends of the box and after a couple of minutes rushed to the attack. There was a tremendous scrimmage with movements so rapid that I could not follow them. When the creatures became quiescent I found that the sharp mandibles of the one that had got the upper hand were deeply embedded in the upper part of the abdomen of the vanquished one. It was soon evident that it was sucking out the inside of its victim. The process was a slow one, but could be followed by the gradual deflation of the body of the one underneath. The victim made no movement and, I suppose, was

either paralysed or dead. After some ten minutes, during which I noticed the gradually increasing girth of the conqueror, it moved away to the side of the box. On picking up the remains of the defunct I found that it weighed next to nothing and that it was merely a wraith of a spider. It had been so completely eviscerated that I was able to blow it away with a breath.

Cruel and childish as it may seem, I amused myself by pitting this victorious spider, successively and at suitable intervals, against other specimens of his kind and of about the same calibre. He was a real champion, and it was not until his seventh fight that he succumbed and was devoured in his turn. I am, by the way, perhaps wrong in attributing to it the masculine gender as it was probably of the other sex. I believe I am right in saying that in the case of most kinds of spiders the females are usually several times larger than the males. The lady after the consummation of a marriage does her best to kill her husband immediately! The smaller and more active the gentleman is, the greater are his chances of escape from his ferocious and voracious spouse. It is a case of the survival of the nimblest.

The spider which had overcome my champion was the property of a friend who had been interested in my operations, and as I claimed that my spider represented the insides of seven others, he asserted that his was entitled to a score of eight. We continued this silly game for some time and, as we added to the score of each victor the number claimed by its opponent, I finally became the proud owner of a spider which might fairly claim to represent the

quintessence of no less than twenty-eight of its predecessors.

Africans are very fond of telling stories about the doings of various animals, and it is not impossible that that king of story-tellers, Rudyard Kipling, may have been inspired by some of them when writing his famous *Jungle Book*. The spider is always the naughty and cunning one in these African tales, and is credited with being the master of mischief. It is he who paints the spots on a leopard or elongates the tail of a monkey, and plays countless tricks on the great beasts of the jungle.

The African slaves brought those stories over from the coast of Guinea. They were also taken to the southern parts of the United States, but among the negroes there it is "Brer Rabbit" who is always the mischief maker. Even to-day in the southern West Indian islands the simple villagers will gather together on moonlit evenings to listen for hours to some old man or woman who will reel out these tales, which are known as "Nancy Stories." I could never ascertain the origin of this name, and came to the conclusion that they were probably connected with some famous old story-teller who rejoiced in the name of Nancy. It was only some years later when I went to the Gold Coast that I found that spiders were called *Ananse* and that the stories were named *Anansesese*. This, of course, was the origin of the West Indian Nancy. I have since heard that in Haiti among the French *patois*-speaking negroes, spiders are always referred to as *Anansi*.

Once, when I was travelling in my hammock along a path in the "bush," I noticed, about two

feet from the ground and between two shrubs, what seemed to be a lovely flower, having a brilliant blue centre. It was shaped like a Saint Andrew's Cross and, with its four white petals, might have been an orchid. I stopped my hammock men and descended so as to examine the flower more closely. To my great surprise I found that it was a spider's web and was suspended between the shrubs by strands of particularly strong silk. What I had taken to be white petals were a narrow, zigzag pattern of thick white silk much resembling lace work. The centre of the "flower" was about the size of a threepenny bit and was formed of the body of the spider, which was of a brilliant blue. The eight tortoise-shell coloured legs of the creature were disposed, like a St. Andrew's Cross, in pairs behind the lace-like arms and gave the necessary stability to the whole design. The thing was evidently a lure for the attraction of insects, and the fact was proved by my finding on the ground under the lure a number of wings and other remains of unfortunate creatures which had fallen victims to this highly artistic spider.

The story is not yet complete. On my touching the web near its centre the blue spider immediately dropped to the ground and assumed the colour of the earth. A capture was effected by my placing over it a small white muslin bag, which I always carried with me on the chance, during my travels, of securing interesting specimens. I carried this spider to my home in Accra, where it found an honoured place among my living spiders and on several occasions before it died it exhibited its wonderful powers of metamorphosis. Though I tried several experiments



the three tones of blue, brown and white seemed to be the limits of its capacities as a "chameleon" spider.

Henry McCook, the great American scientist, in his monumental work on spiders, devoted a chapter to colour mimicry and concluded it by asking whether any of those creatures might have the power of changing the colours of their skin. My spider was the answer to that question, and McCook was so interested in my discovery that he wrote informing me that he had given my name to that spider. I may add that a full account of this spider, written by myself, was published in a number of the well-known British scientific journal *Nature* some time in 1892.

★ 23 ★



THE coloured folk here often tell me stories about buried treasure and assure me that sudden and mysterious rises to affluence may sometimes be reasonably ascribed to the discovery in these rocky islands of hoards of coins, gold ornaments, jewels and other valuables. In view of the fact that the Government claims a large proportion of treasure trove it is not surprising that the lucky finders keep their discoveries a close secret.

The Bahama Islands, of which there are hundreds both large and small, were certainly a great resort of the pirates and buccaneers who flourished in these

western seas during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Though many of them openly visited the little township of Nassau between their cruises, it is unlikely that they would have stored much of their booty there, and it is more probable that they chose much smaller and less-known islets for the concealment of their ill-gotten gains. The whereabouts of these treasures was naturally kept a close secret, and the stories about the murdering of unfortunate slaves who were employed to dig the holes or close the entrances to caverns were probably in many cases not far from the truth.

In those romantic days there were few institutions in the West Indies such as banks, where people could deposit their money, and in many cases wealthy sugar planters would have to make their own private arrangements for the security of their money, plate and jewels. Besides the danger of a sudden descent of a pirate on the shores of their estates, their properties were constantly exposed to raids by the warships of various nations. Britain, France and Spain were constantly at war with each other, and the sugar planters, when a ship appeared on the horizon and seemed to be making for their shore, could never be sure that it was not a pirate or an enemy warship. There were of course in those days none of those rapid means of communication that we are now blessed or cursed with, and the colonist who lived far from any neighbour had in an emergency to rely on his own means and resources for the protection of his property.

One can imagine, in the event of the situation I have just mentioned, how the planter, with a long

telescope to his eye, would anxiously watch the movements of the approaching ship, and if he had to come to the conclusion that a raid on his property was imminent he and his family would immediately take what measures they could to save their valuables. The slaves would be called in to assist in the process, old hiding-places would be re-opened or new ones hastily constructed. Most of the wealthy planters of those times were credited with possessing large quantities of valuable plate while their women folk were often the proud possessors of much jewellery. The process of hiding all these things took a considerable time, and if the enemy were in such strength as to render defence impossible there was nothing for the unfortunate planter and his family to do but to abandon the house and to seek refuge in the dense forest inland.

When they subsequently returned to their home they would probably find no trace of the marauders save the blackened walls and charred timbers of the mansion and the disappearance from rooms of everything that was portable and valuable. The life of a West Indian planter in those adventurous days was far from being all roses and wine. If, perchance, the disaster included the deaths of the owners, the whereabouts of the treasures that they had concealed would probably remain a secret until some lucky negro, centuries later, digging up the ground in his plantain patch, would suddenly uncover wealth that would make him rich beyond his wildest dreams.

The only instance in which I profited in a small way by buried treasure was when I was in the island of Grenada many years ago. A negro woman came

to me and offered to sell a gold coin which she produced from a grimy little bag that contained also a charm and some evil-smelling garlic. This, she said, was a protection against thieves. Garlic and onions, by the way, are often found connected with forms of African sorcery transferred to the West Indies, and I have read somewhere that in ancient Egypt they were even raised to the dignity of deities.

The coin which the woman handed me was a very handsome one, and about the size of a florin. It was evidently of very pure gold and was dated 1737 or 1747. I recognized it as a Portuguese coin which was current in the eighteenth century in the West Indies. The specimen in my hand was considerably thickened by the fact that a lump of pure gold had been beaten into it. This, I was informed later on, was done in order to make it equal in weight to another gold coin that was in general use in the islands in those days. The specimen that I was offered had also been stamped in three places near the edges with the letter G which, I think, probably stood for Grenada. These coins, I was also told, were known as "Plugged Joes."

The woman told me that she had found it with two others in a little earthenware pot that she had dug up in her garden. She offered to sell the coins to me for their equivalent weight in gold. Being then in a rather impecunious position and no collector of coins I only bought one of them and paid thirty-three shillings. I do not know to whom she sold the others. During the ensuing ten years the coin was stolen from me no less than three times, and I decided that as it was said to be rare and of some value I

would sell it. A London dealer in coins said he thought he could obtain a purchaser for about seven pounds, and this I accepted.

I was not over-pleased to learn some time later that a collector had at an auction paid five times as much for a "Plugged Joe."

★ 24 ★

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IN the foregoing pages I have already referred to the conviction, common among primitive West African natives, that the whole unseen world is full of spirits more or less malevolent. When I was in West Africa I found everywhere a firm belief among the people that it was necessary to keep on good terms with the spirits of the dead. All along the coast of Guinea you would find in those days in the near neighbourhood of native dwellings small thatched shelters, usually on posts, protecting rude images, generally of human form. These were the effigies of spirits which were believed to be the guardians of the householder and his family.

It was usually difficult to ascertain any clear ideas as to the nature of these "household gods," but I was told on more than one occasion that they represented the spirits either of ancestors or of members of the family who had become disembodied. Anybody could construct these effigies, but the job of

connecting a spirit with them was by no means easy. It was necessary to procure from the grave of the defunct something closely connected with it, preferably a small bit of the skeleton, some of the hair, or something else connected with some part of the body. This would be embedded in the effigy which would thus become attached to the spirit.

So long as good fortune prevailed in the affairs of the family much respect and attention would be paid to the idol, and offerings of eggs, fruit and even meat would frequently be placed before it. But if, on the contrary, disease and misfortune prevailed, the idol would be maltreated in various ways. It might be soundly beaten and in severe cases be thrust head downwards into the ground.

But the unsophisticated natives of Africa are not the only people who ill-treat and punish their idols. When I was in Brittany and lived among fishermen I was told that many of them considered St. Peter as their protecting spirit and believed that it depended largely on him whether their fishing was successful or not. Some of them would keep a little silver image of the Saint in a small box which they kept in their pockets. So long as the fishing was good and the weather propitious the Saint was kept upright in his box, but when storms were protracted and nothing was caught the Saint would be turned upside down and made to stand on his head until matters improved. I was told that this practice is also to be found among the Basque fishermen in the Bay of Biscay.

The people of ancient Rome were considered to have reached a fairly high stage of philosophy, yet

thought it no shame to placate their deities by material gifts. Libations to the gods, in the shape of wine and other drinks, were frequently offered, and the primitive West Africans thus have high-class authority for the practice of spilling on the ground a portion of the drink which they are about to imbibe. In the case of water the offering is copious, but when it is a matter of palm-wine it is far less liberal. And when the drink is the much prized trade gin the amount given to the other sort of "spirits" verges on the parsimonious.

I remember that once, in my early Gold Coast days, I was touring a district in the interior of the territory and as usual received a visit from the "King" of the district. He was a very old negro and very emaciated. He wore a sort of kilt of native cloth of various colours, and round his shrunk shoulders hung a cloak of cotton ornamented by curious native patterns. He was accompanied by two of his councillors, and all three sat in a semicircle in front of me on the carved wooden stools which their attendant had brought for them.

After we had talked for a little while about the affairs of the district, the moment arrived for the circulation of the inevitable "drink." Calling my servant I was rather dismayed to find from him that our stock of the usual gin was exhausted and that the local liquor dealer's shop was closed. As my visitor was of high degree I found myself obliged to produce my last precious bottle of whisky. When I poured out nearly half a tumbler of the golden liquid I saw a vivid glint in the eyes of the old king which betokened an immense joy at the prospect

of tasting for the first time the rare and potent beverage which, he knew from hearsay, was so greatly prized by the white men.

I could see that, as he held the glass in his palsied hands, something was greatly worrying the old man. Several times he passed his tongue over his shrivelled black lips and I, knowing the custom of the country, felt sure that his mind was being torn by the thought of how much of the precious liquid he would offer to the gods. Suddenly, mustering up his courage, he seemed to make up his mind. With a glare of defiance around the room he raised the glass to his lips and drained it in one huge gulp. All that the spirits got was a copious expectoration on the mud floor of the hut in which we were sitting.

\* 25 \*

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THE pretty little town of Nassau is built on a gently sloping hillside facing the blue waters of the harbour. Through some unwritten law almost the whole of the part that faces north is occupied by the business houses and residences of white or nearly white people, while the other side of the hill contains nothing but the homes of some twenty thousand coloured folk. Domesticity have a rooted objection to sleeping anywhere else than in the quarter that is



usually designated as "over the hill." There are considerable advantages and disadvantages in this plan.

I have just returned from a walk through that locality and I cannot say that I am much impressed by the amount of foresight hitherto shown by the authorities in regard to the development of this thickly inhabited place; except for a few houses here and there that have been built in recent years by people who have prospered, the general impression is one of poverty and of miserable dwellings.

It is a regrettable fact that up to lately very little attention has been paid to the very important subject of town planning in the great African Colonies and Protectorates which we are otherwise rapidly developing. In most cases villages and small townships are allowed to grow like "Topsy" and, in a measure as the inhabitants of those places grow in civilization, much money and trouble will have to be spent in providing decent conditions of urban life.

I have always been a strong believer in the adage: "A man lives up to or down to his house," and there can be no doubt that a rise in civilization among primitive people depends largely on the improvement of their dwellings. During the years that I was entrusted with the government of Northern Nigeria I gave much attention to this subject. We were then constructing a railway leading from the coast up to the distant territories inland and had to take the easiest and most direct line to those places. We were therefore often obliged to bypass ancient and important native cities. I found that in the vicinity of the stations on the newly laid line of railway large

villages were already springing up like mushrooms and were attracting considerable populations. Native huts were being constructed at the sweet will of each builder and without the slightest regard to the direction of streets or roads and without any consideration for the requirements of sanitation.

I determined that a stop should be put to this as quickly as possible, and confess to having had the audacity to try my prentice hand at making a design for native towns which would ensure a considerable degree of cleanliness, ventilation and good order. My plan was of the chessboard order. The sites would, of course, have to be approved by sanitary experts and wherever possible be in uncultivated open country and capable of easy drainage. The main lines of my plan were broad avenues crossed at right angles by roads of lesser width, and provision was made for an adequate number of open spaces, at regular distances, which would provide for large markets, recreation grounds and the cultivation of low-growing food crops. Fortunately we could work on a large scale unhampered in most cases by vested rights of private property. In Nigeria there are vast areas of unoccupied and uncultivated land almost everywhere, and the Government in my time had the fullest powers of acquiring almost immediate possession of any area which was required for public purposes.

While it was of course a great responsibility it was, as may be imagined, a great delight to be able to select the sites of future townships, and the happiest days that I spent in Northern Nigeria were those in which I was thus occupied. My staff and I would

spend days riding all over the country, noting the possibilities offered by various localities and visualizing, with perhaps prophetic eyes, the developments that might be possible in the future. It was a scale and nature of work which in these prosaic days rarely falls to the lot of a colonial administrator. In the happy days of which I am writing the Governor of Northern Nigeria was unassisted, or "untrammelled," as the case might be, by Public Boards or councils of any sort, and the Colonial Office wisely gave him a very free hand.

It was only in matters of finance that the shoe often pinched. The local revenues in those days were entirely inadequate to provide for the full charges of the government, and the annual deficits had to be met by substantial grants from the Imperial Exchequer. We were therefore much under the thumbs of "My Lords of the Treasury," and when one considered the vast possibilities of the territory it was indeed discouraging to see our annual estimates of expenditure cut down to the very bone. Our people at home did not seem to realize that, with the cheap and abundant native labour then available in our African protectorates, public works could be executed at a cost of, say, a hundred thousand pounds which ten or fifteen years later would probably cost twice as much. In spite of these limitations it must, however, be conceded that the progress made during the past thirty years in some of our West African protectorates has been very great. The annual revenue of Northern Nigeria now amounts to over £10,000,000 while the value of its exports exceeds £14,000,000 a year. Instead of receiving Grants-in-Aid from the



*[To face page 154*



British Treasury, Nigeria has been able during the war to make handsome contributions to the Imperial Government out of its surplus revenues.

Among the members of the administrative staff serving in Northern Nigeria in my day there was a young Assistant Resident who was a marvel at laying out native towns according to my plan. As soon as a site had been decided on he would be given a sum of forty pounds, which he told me would be quite sufficient for his purpose. With a native plough he and his men would run furrows in the soft sandy soil according to the lines of avenues and roads indicated on my plan.

He would then buy at a cost of twopence apiece a large number of poles about seven feet high. These would be stuck in, seven feet apart in the furrows, thus ensuring the continuance of perfectly straight lines—a thing which, left to himself, an unsophisticated African seems to be quite unable to do. With the remainder of his money my young friend would then proceed to buy at a cost of threepence each a vast number of native grass mats measuring seven feet by six. These mats would be fastened to the poles, and served two purposes; firstly, to ensure a good alignment, and, secondly, to provide a definite guide for the native builder, who would enclose his house plot with the usual African mud wall. As soon as the walls bordering on the avenues and roads had been completed, the poles and mats would be removed and used over and over again. It used to give me great pleasure, when visiting such a locality very soon after giving the order, to see laid out before me what seemed, outwardly at least, to be

quite an important and spacious native town, with its broad avenues and wide-open squares.

During my time more than ten of these new native settlements were laid out, and I was glad to hear that among the people they were known as *Garin Bell* or Bell towns. I have also had the satisfaction of learning, since I left Nigeria, that my plan for native towns has been approved and adopted in several of our other African protectorates and that a copy of it is prominently exhibited in the Wellcome Research Bureau in London.

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SOME days ago I referred to that repulsive, snakelike fish, the moray. It has again been in evidence in my pool and my man was fortunately able to put a small harpoon through it just as it was attacking a beautiful little angel fish.

These sea snakes often attain a length of three or four feet and even more, and may be as thick as your arm. Their bite is said to be very poisonous and they are much feared by the fisher-folk. When talking about these snakes my fisherman has hinted darkly at the existence in these waters of a gigantic serpent, many fathoms long, which rears its snakelike head high out of the water. This must, of course, be a relative of our old friend the Great Sea Serpent and

my mind reverts at once to the mysterious Loch Ness Monster.

Most people will remember the world-wide sensation that was created some years ago by the reports that an extraordinary marine creature of the sea-serpent genus had been seen several times in a small lake in the north of Scotland. The creature only occasionally displayed itself and only at the darkling hour on calm evenings. Many of the people who averred that they had seen it were said to be worthy of credence, and the fame of the "Monster" spread far and wide. The appearance of this phenomenon coincided with the newspapers' "silly season," and the Press everywhere made the most of this "scoop."

Descriptions of the monster were curiously similar to nearly all previous accounts of sea serpents, whether seen in an ocean or in the great central African lakes. It was explained that this strange denizen of the deep must have selected Loch Ness for a visit to Scotland because that small lake is connected with the sea by a channel of water of the depth required. The beast showed much tact in choosing for its visit the season which is the most profitable for the hotels that are in the vicinity of that pretty little lake.

I was interested in this matter because, when I was in Uganda, I was told that a distinguished official of the Foreign Office, Sir Clement Hill, who was inspecting our East African protectorates two years before I went there, had declared that he had distinctly seen a "great sea serpent" when crossing Lake Victoria. He was a man not given to intemperance or exaggeration and stated that, not more than a



quarter of a mile away from his ship, he had clearly seen emerging from the perfectly calm water a long glistening neck surmounted by a large head resembling in shape that of a lizard. He said that the neck seemed to be about four feet long, and that almost immediately after its appearance above the surface he saw a large rounded elongated mass which appeared to be the body of the creature. He also saw in the rear of the great hump the convolutions of what he took to be some sort of a tail. The animal, whatever it was, remained above the surface long enough for the native crew of the boat to recognize it as a gigantic specimen of what they called a *Lokwata*. They declared that the apparition of such a creature was an extremely rare occurrence and that its habitat was certainly somewhere in the almost unfathomable depths in the centre of the great lake.

About two years later I found myself travelling on the western boundary of Uganda and was camping on a sand bank near the spot where the Semliki river flows into Lake Albert. One afternoon I was out with my rifle, and seeing some unusual object that was just emerging from the water out of the lake, I fired a couple of shots at it. On approaching my quarry I found to my surprise that to a great extent it filled the description given by the Foreign Office official of his famous sea serpent. The native boy who was accompanying me said that it certainly was a *Lokwata* but of very small size, and he seemed to view it with dread. But to me it appeared to be only a large specimen of a strange and rare variety of turtle. It had a neck measuring several inches in length and had a snakelike head. Its flippers were very similar

to the ones usually found in sea turtles, but the tail, which is usually very short in turtles and tortoises, was some inches in length. But instead of the usual hard back of turtles the carapace was of a very thick, soft rubber-like texture. I could imagine that when the animal was on the surface of the water this large rounded form would give the impression of a body attached to the long snake-like neck, and I think Sir Clement Hill was fully justified in believing that he had seen a specimen of one of the great antediluvian monsters which may perhaps still lurk in the immense depths of the great African Lakes.

If I may be allowed to revert to the Loch Ness Monster, I venture to insert here a copy of a letter that I wrote to the *Morning Post* in 1934. It ran as follows :

#### A SYNTHETIC MONSTER

"SIR,

May it be that the evanescent apparition that is haunting Loch Ness is a synthetic Monster?

A great rubber bag, suitably shaped and inflated, would produce the likeness of quite a respectable sea serpent. The big, buoyant toys, in the shape of various creatures, which have been the joy of sea-bathing children during recent summers would be the basis of such an idea and there would be no difficulty in producing a "Monster" with any number of humps and flippers, long thin neck and small head complete.

A rubber concoction of such a type might indeed be constructed so substantially and on so large a scale as to permit of its interior being

occupied by one or even more persons. It could be submerged to any extent required, in which case the 'long, thin neck' so often described would make an admirable periscope. A small motor screw below the surface would easily enable the 'creature' to proceed at quite a considerable pace, while the supply of a long, undulating 'tail' would be child's play. No great ingenuity or scientific skill would be required to produce an affair of this sort.

The deflated 'Monster' could easily be concealed anywhere in the spacious, deep waters of Loch Ness and the perpetrators of this possible journalistic 'stunt' could embark in their rubber submarine whenever it was desirable to keep it in the public eye.

In any case, gorgeous joke or thrilling mystery, the Loch Ness Monster has been a priceless boon to the Press of the world and a harmless topic of conversation to countless millions."

Whether my suggestion had anything in it or not, it is an odd fact that very shortly after the appearance of my letter to the *Morning Post* the famous "Monster" faded away and, I believe, was never heard of again. And I make bold to believe that I killed it!

THIS morning my special pet, the box fish, behaved very badly. I was feeding it with a bit of conch meat, which I held between my fingers, when, instead of taking it politely as usual, it gave me a very sharp bite on the tip of my finger. The little beggar seemed to know that he had done wrong, because he darted like a flash to the other end of the pool.

I am not quite happy about the bite of my box fish because I happen to know what that sort of creature is capable of. When I was in Mauritius I used to get most of the fish for my aquarium out of fishpots which we used to lay in the shallow waters of the bay in which my country cottage was situated. One morning I found in one of the fishpots a small box fish, with about half a dozen other small fish of various sorts. The box fish, which was about four inches long, had a rough skin of steely grey, bearing large round spots of a beautiful turquoise blue surrounded by black circles. When I picked it up to examine more closely its small, pig-like snout and expressive eyes, the creature emitted from its interior a sound like a gurgling croak. It then spat two or three drops of water at me, and a lot of iridescent froth was exuded from its mouth. I threw it with the other small fish into a bucket of sea water. A few moments later, on our way back to the aquarium I noticed that all the fish in the bucket except the box fish seemed to be having convulsions and to be dying. Their contortions indicated great agony, and

I saw that the eyes of one of them, a sort of trigger fish, had turned a brilliant scarlet.

My old negro boatman then told me that the box fish was poisoning the other fish, and that they would all die. This proved to be the case in a few minutes. The man asserted that such flesh as could be found in the interior of a large box fish is particularly succulent, but that it is fatal to dogs. My cook here has confirmed this, and she tells me that, when preparing that kind of fish for cooking, she is very careful to remove from a part of the head a sort of gland which is known to be very poisonous.

It seems to me that this matter is worth careful investigation at the hands of scientists. Some creatures, especially insects and reptiles and notably snakes, are known to exude violent poisons which possess great therapeutic value and are used in the cure of various diseases. The poison exuded by box fish may prove to be of special value in medical practice. It is possible that this poison may be a weapon which the box fish uses to protect itself against other and larger fish, and I am strengthened in this idea because I have never seen a box fish, even a small one, attacked by any other fish in my pool.

About two months ago, among the fish brought to me by my fisherman was one known as the porcupine fish. It proved to be a remarkable creature and speedily became the "star turn" of the aquarium. It was only about twenty inches long, including the rather large, wide tail fin, but its comparatively bulky girth made it one of the largest fish in the pool. The head is so large and broad as to be out of proportion to the rest of the body, and is almost

square. The eyes are abnormally wide and lustrous. The large deep brown pupils are surrounded by a white circle which gives them an amazingly human appearance, and on occasions they seem to be able to move independently. They are placed so much forward that they are almost horizontal. The mouth is also straight across the face—if one may speak of a fish's face—and instead of teeth there are two smooth bands of bone which, when the lips are retracted, look much like rows of large, even human teeth. If there were a nose, the resemblance to a human visage would be astonishing. The skin of this fish is devoid of scales and very tough. It is usually of a rather tawny yellow colour, thickly powdered with small brown spots.

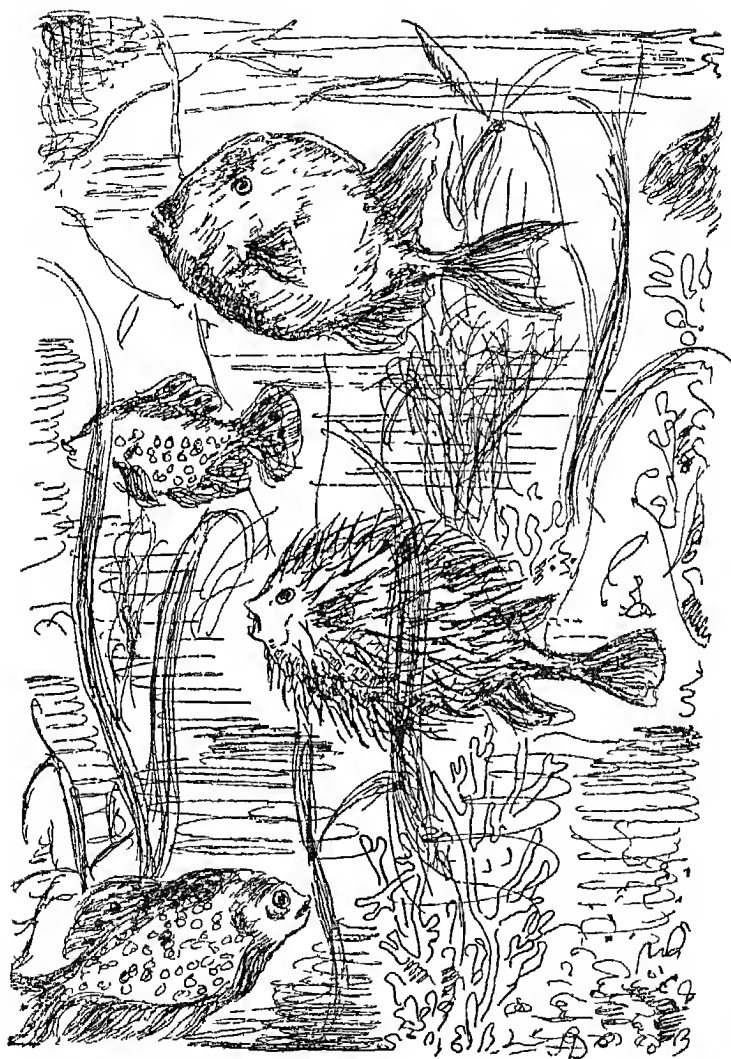
Almost all over the body are long white spines, varying from half an inch to an inch and a half in length, and sharp as needles. These are usually lying flat, but when the fish is alarmed are at once erected. It is not surprising that this creature has been given the name of porcupine and, as if these prickly defences were not sufficient, the fish is able to inflate itself to an amazing extent, and the one now before me can blow itself out to the size of a large football. This enables the fish, when attacked, to rise speedily to the surface of the sea and so to become a very elusive object to a pursuer. My fisherman tells me that these porcupine fish are often to be seen, fully inflated, floating lazily on the surface of a calm sea and evidently enjoying the air. It would therefore appear to be almost an amphibious creature, and this accounts for the fact that my specimen will sometimes allow itself to be pulled almost right out of the water

and to remain in the air for some seconds sooner than let go the bit of conch meat that it has grasped in its powerful jaws.

Not satisfied with inflation and prickly spines, the porcupine is also able to exude from its skin a slimy liquid which probably enables it to slip almost out of the very jaws of a pursuer. I am told that specimens up to a length of about three feet are sometimes found, but as they contain very little edible meat, fishermen very seldom bring them to market. During the first three days after its arrival the porcupine in my pool, after inspecting its new abode, remained very quiet and usually lay on the sand in a corner of the pool. But during the following two days it began to move about freely among the other fishes. It seemed to inspire no fear among them and the general harmony that exists in the pool was not disturbed by the advent of this apparently formidable intruder.

"Porky" as I soon began to call it—I was never able to come to any conclusion as to the sex of the creature—soon surpassed all the other fish in tameness and familiarity. It would always be the first to come to me as soon as I appeared and was evidently able to distinguish me from a considerable distance. Like the trigger fish it would show excitement when it perceived the process of breaking up a conch shell and extracting the meat. If presentation of the food was somewhat delayed Porky would open its mouth and gnash its big teeth at me, at the same time retracting the skin from them in a sort of fishlike smile.

Sometimes Porky is so tame and amiable that it





will allow me to stroke with my hand the recumbent spines on its back. It is always the first to come to the step as soon as I appear and, retracting its lips, clicks its teeth at me. I have not yet the courage to put my fingers very near the big mouth, and Porky takes its food from a fork like a Christian. The jaws are immensely powerful and Porky, in its eagerness to take the food, has sometimes bent the prongs of the fork as if they were of tin. Despite its strength of jaw and great teeth this porcupine seems to be the most amiable of creatures and I have never seen it attack or bite any other fish. On some occasions, at low tide, when the depth of water is only a foot or so, I venture to paddle about among the fish. Not once has Porky or any of the other creatures attempted to bite me and they fearlessly move about my feet.

I am bound to believe that several of my fish have that strange perception of the feelings towards them shown by many domesticated animals, and know by some sort of intuition whether one is malignantly inclined or the reverse. There is no doubt that this porcupine fish possesses a sense of humour and displays it much as a dog or cat would. Between meal-times it will come up to me as usual and play with a rope that I dangle in front of it. It will make grabs at it and seems to enjoy being gently beaten by it. It will pursue the end of the rope as a kitten might and spits water violently at me if unsuccessful. Sometimes it seems to lose its temper and shakes itself viciously, spitting such quantities of water at me that I am often copiously splashed.

The only evidence of malevolence shown by Porky was given some weeks ago when another

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fish of the same species was put into the pool. It was almost the same size and colour, but as soon as Porky saw the new arrival it started to chase it round and round the aquarium. This pursuit, save for a few short intervals, continued for hours and when night fell it was still in progress. Next morning the intruder was found dead, but strangely enough the body showed no signs of any injury. This incident, while it detracted from Porky's reputation for amiability, showed at all events that it possessed a strong leaven of individuality.

The porcupine is far from being the only kind of fish which from my experience is able to distinguish one person from another, and how they do it is a mystery to me. We are able to know one dog or cow or bird from another because of their coloration and shape which never change, but to the animals and to my fish we are always "changing our spots." I, for instance, when I enter the cabane over the pool, am sometimes in a dark blue suit, sometimes in parti-coloured clothes and sometimes even in a long dressing-gown or pyjamas. On occasions I wear a hat, and sometimes am even bare- or bald-headed. And yet my porcupine in particular immediately recognizes me even at a distance and comes to me for food instead of to my servant who may be standing near me. I have never found anyone who could give me a reasonable explanation of this, and most of them have taken refuge in that convenient and all-embracing word "instinct." The question I have put is, however, surely a very interesting one.

The sea-fish in my aquarium are far from being the only kinds that have shown to me that they were

able to recognize me personally. I have, many times in my life, been addicted to the keeping of goldfish, and knowing by experience how vivacious and apparently happy they can be when allowed sufficient space, I was always careful to give them liberal accommodation.

In the gardens at Government House in Mauritius there was a fountain playing into an ornamental basin of considerable size, and a dozen or more of beautiful goldfish disported themselves in it. My observations showed that they varied considerably in habits and character. Beyond coming up at regular hours to be fed, the majority of them showed no interesting characteristics and kept together. Two of them, however, quickly showed marked signs of individuality and soon began to behave almost as pet animals would. These two flashing bits of scarlet and gold became well-known "characters"—under the names of Simon and Peter many of my visitors will remember them. When I approached the fountain these two little fish would evidently recognize me and, separating themselves from their group, would come to the edge of the basin to meet me. They would nibble my fingers and play with my hands, and many times did they even suffer me to lift them gently out of the water. It was only to me that they behaved in this way, and there could be no doubt that those two goldfish knew me personally and had some sort of affection for me.

To confine such fish in a bowl of water, often exposed for hours to the full glare of the sun, and in a vessel so small that the unfortunate captive is only capable of moving round and round its prison

in monotonous motion, can be nothing but torture to the unfortunate fish and is just as cruel as it is to incarcerate a bird in a miserable little cage. How often are the dead bodies of these beautiful, glistening creatures found among the rubbish in the refuse pails, telling of the lingering death of one of God's loveliest creatures, merely to satisfy the pleasure given by the flash of its iridescence as it swims round and round in its stupefying unrest.

The gist of what I have just written appeared in a letter that I wrote to *The Times* in 1934, and I am glad to say that it attracted much attention. Through the interest taken in the matter by a humanitarian society 40,000 copies of my letter were distributed to primary schools in Britain, and I like to think that they had some effect on the people aimed at.

★ 28 ★



ON looking over my notes I see that some weeks ago I wrote something about a violent poison which the box fish is able to emit and I wondered whether this particular sort of venom has ever been scientifically examined.

The subject of mysterious poisons brings back to my memory an incident connected therewith which came to my knowledge when I was on the Gold

Coast a great many years ago. I was then stationed at Accra and one of my principal friends at that time was Sir Joseph Hutchinson, the Chief Justice, a fine upstanding north countryman, a very able lawyer and a very interesting companion. On one occasion I was having tea with him on his verandah when a servant came up to say that the King of Accra was downstairs and wished to see him. I may say at once that this did not mean that a potent monarch had deigned to do the Chief Justice honour, because "kings" in West Africa in those days were very plentiful and somewhat of the grade of the kings mentioned in the Bible who in the days of Joshua seemed to be so plentiful in Palestine.

As a matter of fact this "King" Tackie, of Accra, was only the native head of the inhabitants of a town which was then, as it still is, the capital of the Gold Coast Colony, and his revenues would hardly amount to a thousand pounds a year. He was a very old man, and, judging by the miserably poor condition of the dirty white gown that he wore when he presented himself upstairs, might even have been a beggar. It was soon evident that he had come *incognito* and that the object of his visit was of a secret nature. It was only after some hesitation that he agreed to my presence during the interview.

He spoke very poor pidgin-English but managed to inform the Chief Justice that he had come to ask his advice as to what should be done to stop the great number of deaths that were occurring among his people through the effects of a violent poison which was being placed on the doorsteps of people's houses. He explained that this poison, which was

prepared by sorcerers, was of such a violent nature that a person, merely by stepping over it, would die.

"How can you expect me to believe such rubbish?" said the Chief Justice. The old King looked rather disgusted and, pulling his shabby gown more tightly around his scraggy shoulders, said, "Yes, Sah, but we Africans does know dat it is true and dat ebery time dat kind of poison be put in de gate of a man's yard, somebody in dat house is going to die bery soon."

Finding that the Chief Justice could not or would not help in the matter, the old man rather disgruntledly took his departure. Sir Joseph and I, after talking over the matter, were inclined to come to the conclusion that there might after all be something in the old man's story. Native dwellings in West Africa are nearly always built on the same pattein and they are usually surrounded by a mud wall, enclosing a courtyard into which there is only one gateway or entrance. This courtyard is devoted to all sorts of avocations. The goats and sheep and other domestic animals wander about in it, and the household cooking nearly always is done in the middle of it. Earthenware pots and pans are always lying about on the ground, and chickens and ducks will usually be seen hopping about among them picking up stray bits of food. The door or gateway is often left open, and the fowls usually go in and out into the street to pick up further food. The Chief Justice agreed with me that if some mixture containing a violent poison were laid on the threshold of the entrance it would be quite possible for one of the fowls to pick up in its feet some of this dangerous stuff and

then to scatter it among the pots and pans in which the family's food would subsequently be prepared and cooked. The object of the enemy would thus be attained, and one or more of the family might suffer serious illness and even death. Such a simple solution of the mystery would, however, rarely satisfy the unsophisticated African, and he, like old King Tackie, would far rather believe that a person could be done to death merely by stepping over poison.

This superstitious belief in the power of doing harm to a person who would merely step over a poisonous mess placed in his or her path is also current among many negroes in the Caribbean Islands who still believe in sorcery. Though Obeah is closely connected with ideas prevalent in West Africa at the time of the slave trade, it must not be confused with Fetishism. The latter name is usually given to the religious beliefs of the pagan natives of the coast of Guinea who have not been affected by Christian missions and, while many of its priests may dabble in arts that may reasonably be termed black, those practices have little or nothing to do with religion.

While missionaries are often apt to refer rather contemptuously to Fetishism as "the worship of sticks and stones," I believe that many of those who have been competent to study the subject on the spot will agree with me that it is almost worthy of being considered as a definite form of religion and that its origin may be traced far back to ancient Egypt. When I was in West Africa long ago I interested myself considerably in the subject. Christian missionaries were few and far between, while Fetish priests were to be found in every village. I was

surprised to find that the main lines of the system in localities many hundreds of miles apart were almost identical and that Fetishism had its sylvan temples, its trained hierarchy of priests, its secret language and its long novitiate. I was still more surprised to find that the ceremonial costume of Fetish priests closely resembled the kind worn by the priests of Thebes in the days of the Pharaohs as depicted on the walls of Egyptian temples. There was the same white kilt, the same tall, conical white cap, and the similarity was completed by the leopard skin worn across the shoulders. It is probable that, with the gradual progress of Christian ideas among the people of the West African seaboard, the old forms and ritual of Fetishism which I noted fifty years ago could now only be found in their full vigour in the remote and dense forests of the interior.

★ 29 ★



THE Bahama Islands are a wonderful hunting-ground for conchologists and many of the coral shores are strewn with beautiful shells of many varieties. Sea shells are indeed important items of export besides being used in the local manufacture of necklaces, brooches, and other items of feminine adornment.



The subject of shells brings back to my memory the glistening little cowries that were so much in evidence on the west coast of Africa when I was there in the early 'nineties. These shells were then the principal currency used by the primitive natives of the Gold Coast, and their story is rather an interesting one. Save for very small numbers they are rarely found on the surf-beaten shores of the Gulf of Guinea, but on the contrary they exist in huge quantities on the shores of various parts of the south-eastern coasts of Africa. I was never able to learn why and when these little shells were first used as money in West Africa, but in my day immense numbers of them were in circulation among the natives. I was told that they were imported, almost in ship-loads, from the other side of the continent and that by calculating the cost of collection, freight and charges it was possible, on their arrival on the Gold Coast, to attach to them a fairly fixed value. By breaking the backs of the shells it was possible to put them on strings, and when I lived in Accra a string of twenty cowries was, I think, worth a penny and all small purchases in the markets were made in this simple currency. It was really a very ingenious idea, as forgery was impossible and it was a very convenient form of money to the dusky dames who did without pockets and whose costumes often consisted of little more than a few strings of beads.

In those days living was very cheap on the Gold Coast and much of the trade in small markets was done by barter. I remember that a friend of mine, who was in charge of the Kitta district, told me how, when he was on leave of absence in London, he had

come across a place in the City where a lot of goods salvaged from a fire were being sold. Among them was a great bale of red cotton handkerchiefs. Though the outside of the bale had been somewhat damaged, he judged that there must be many hundreds of handkerchiefs in the interior which should be in good condition. As the price asked for the bale was absurdly low my friend, without exactly knowing what he would do with it, bought it and included it in his baggage on his return journey to West Africa.

The bale of kerchiefs proved to be worth a small fortune. He told me that when he was back in his old quarters at Kitta he used to hand out to his cook-boy each morning one of these bright red kerchiefs. They were so much appreciated by the ladies of the market that the servant would return with almost a load of vegetables, fish and other food. My friend assured me that he kept house for almost a year on the proceeds of that damaged bale.

There was a well-defined system of exchange in the matter of the shell currency, and they increased in value in accordance with the distance from the seaboard to the locality in which they were circulating. In those days there was no form of transport of goods except in the shape of loads of about 50 lbs. carried by native porters on their heads. The cowrie shells sent *en masse* in that way increased in value with each day's transport. Porters in my day used to be paid a shilling a day for transport into the interior. Thus, a sack of cowries, which was worth twenty shillings on the seaboard would, after a day's journey from the coasts, be worth twenty-one shillings, and so on until in the interior the shells would in most cases

have a current value much higher than on the coast, and one which was well known to all the people.

Progress in the British protectorates and colonies that lay on the seaboard was fairly rapid, and small coins of base metal introduced by the Government have gradually replaced cowries almost everywhere. I am told, however, that in remote districts cowries are still current to a considerable extent. When I was administering the government of Northern Nigeria in 1909 we were trying to establish a definite system of finance in the native administrations, and a fair amount of progress was being made in the great Mohammedan emirates. Some idea of the magnitude of our operations in those territories may be gained from the fact that the Emir of Kano, for instance, ruled over more than two million subjects and governed his people through a hierarchy of district chiefs with a considerable amount of honesty and intelligence. But he and the other Moslem rulers of the territory were ultra-conservative, and while they offered no direct opposition to the administrative innovations which we gradually imposed on them, they in most cases viewed them with only moderate enthusiasm.

Kano was several hundreds of miles from the sea and the railway that we were then building had only reached half-way. There were then practically no European traders in the great city of Kano in spite of its sixty thousand inhabitants. Trade with the exterior was on a very low ebb, banks were unknown and the local currency consisted almost entirely of the cowrie shells of which I have been writing.

The public revenue, almost entirely derived from direct taxes, was divided equally into two parts, one of which was retained by the Protectorate Government while the other was given to the native administrations. Although the revenue was collected mainly in kind, we tried to induce the native treasurers to keep their accounts in sterling, and it gave me much satisfaction to learn from the Resident in charge of the province that the Kano Emirate at the time of my visit was boasting of a surplus of not less than £6,000. I was so surprised and pleased to hear this that I expressed a desire to see this "nest egg" for myself.

I was then taken to a large building in the centre of the city. Like all others of native construction it was of sun-dried bricks, roughly made. But, as far as I can remember, it was composed of three stories under the usual West African flat roof. The interior comprised a number of very narrow passages giving access to scores and scores of small, unlighted rooms. Each of these cells had a rough but massive wooden door furnished with a primitive sort of native lock. The British officer who was accompanying me ordered that several of these doors should be opened and I was amazed to find that every cell was filled, right up to the low ceiling, with very large bags that were full of nothing but cowries, and I was assured by the official in charge that the amount of cowries filling all those rooms fully represented a value of £6,000 at the current rate of exchange. On my asking him how such a calculation could be arrived at he explained that the cubic capacity of each room having been ascertained, and it being

known that each sack of cowries represented more or less so many thousands of cowries to the cubic foot it was comparatively easy, without actually counting the shells, to estimate approximately the total value of the contents of the building. I confess that I was much impressed by this essentially rough and ready method of keeping public accounts.

While I was discussing the matter in front of the open door of one of these Treasury "safes" I noticed that there seemed to be a sort of disturbance in the passage farther on, accompanied by shouts from the native blue-clad Dogari who formed our escort, and I was amused to hear that, on turning the corner of one of the passages, they had been suddenly charged by a big oryx. This is an antelope as large as a big donkey, which boasts of a pair of very long and pointed horns, projecting forward, and often a yard in length. I was told that this beast was particularly fierce and that it was intended to patrol the corridors of the Treasury and to guard the place from any marauders. I congratulated myself on not being the first to encounter this very efficient guard.

In the following year we were confronted by a rather serious problem in regard to this same great accumulation of cowries. The construction of the Baro-Kano railway was making great progress and trade conditions in the great northern city were changing rapidly. British coins of small value were becoming increasingly popular and the local rate for cowries was falling to an alarming extent. It looked as if the great reserve held by the native treasury might ere long become almost a drug in the market. To my surprise the Emir and his advisers showed

themselves quite equal to the situation and settled it in a very ingenious manner.

It was, of course, the railway that was going to kill the cowrie. Fortunately Nigeria is an immense territory and a large number of years must elapse before railways can be pushed on to many of the distant provinces. The chief of these was in my time the great and populous province of Bornu in which Lake Chad is situated. This territory was then so remote from headquarters that it was almost an independent state. Its ruler, known as the Shehu of Bornu, was considered as one of the three greatest native princes of Northern Nigeria and ruled his country satisfactorily under the guidance and advice of the wise and experienced British officer who was then in charge of that portion of the Protectorate. But the people of Bornu were at that time still in a very primitive condition and cowries continued to be the main medium of exchange. Taking advantage of this position, the Emir of Kano settled his currency problem very intelligently.

He bought a great number of camels, loaded them up with all the cowries in his treasury, and dispatched the whole lot to Bornu, hundreds of miles away. The shells were gradually exchanged there for cattle, sheep and goats, and the out-of-date treasury reserve of Kano came back to the capital "on the hoof"—and was in due time transformed into easily negotiable securities. Our financial magnates might sometimes get valuable tips from the unsophisticated financiers of darkest Africa.

I HAVE just returned from visiting a neighbour who keeps a small monkey. He is much attached to the creature and was distressed to see that it seemed to be very ill. The poor little beast coughed incessantly and seemed to me to be in an advanced stage of consumption.

A monkey at the end of a chain may sometimes afford amusement, but only to those who do not realize the mental suffering that such a form of captivity must entail to so sensitive and active a creature as an ape. The poor little beast that I have just seen had a look of such misery in its eyes that it brought back to my memory a letter that I wrote to *The Times* some years ago, in which I protested against the capture and isolation of some of the great apes which are so much akin to human beings. The letter was headed "Prisoners and Captives" and described what I saw during a visit to a small place at Cagnes on the Riviera, where wild animals from tropical parts were kept pending their sale and distribution to menageries in various parts of Europe. The following is an extract from my letter:

"About three weeks ago there appeared in *The Times* an account of the arrival of some sixty Orang-utans at a Zoological Garden on the Riviera, and in your issue of the 8th inst. there was another description of a descent of 'forty-six Orang-utans, including seven families of three,' at an establishment in the Tottenham Court Road.

“Up to quite recently a live Orang in Europe was a rare spectacle, and the sudden appearance of more than a hundred of these distant cousins of ours must



be of more than passing interest, not only to those who are students of the Ascent of Man, but especially to all who are keen on the preservation of tropical fauna.



“The suddenness of this large influx of specimens of the great ape, which is the nearest approach to man, indicates that some method of capturing them wholesale has recently been adopted. I learn that such is the case. It seems that a European in Sumatra, having discovered the favourite habitat of a considerable number of Orang-utans, is making use of the following method. He collects a small army of natives and conducts them to the great virgin forest in which the gigantic apes have their homes. The Orangs live in small communities or families. The hunters, by terrifying the animals, succeed in concentrating a group into a clump of trees, which is then isolated by the cutting down of all the surrounding vegetation. The few trees in which the Orangs have taken refuge are then felled, and by means of very strong nets of great size the majority of the animals are secured. It seems to be a fairly humane system of capture, but it is probable that a good many of the great apes are grievously wounded or even killed in the process. Mothers, hampered by very small infants, are of course the ones most easily taken. Accustomed to roam in spacious liberty through the huge forests, feeding on the fruits and succulent leaves of their choice, the sufferings of these unfortunate captives during their long sea voyage to Europe, cooped up in cages in which they cannot stand upright, needs no description.

“A few days ago I visited the establishment at Cagnes in which the remnant of the recent consignment is still to be seen. Of the original sixty individuals about fifteen remained. The others had either been sold and dispatched to various zoological gardens

in Europe and America or had died. Though housed in fairly large wooden cages, kept in scrupulous cleanliness and evidently well cared for, the sight of these great, gentle creatures, each in a separate compartment, could not but arouse a feeling of profound pity. Most of them are magnificent specimens, giants of colossal strength. Clad completely in coats of long tawny hair, they have an appearance of modest decency rare among monkeys. The huge males, with their great heads and flat faces, framed in an aureole of extended cheek-bones, have an appearance of reposeful dignity that inspires respect. Almost motionless, with folded arms, the enormous creatures seem to pass their days and nights in dismal reverie. If the eyes are the 'windows of the soul' the orbs of these unfortunates show a condition of spirit that is pitiful indeed. The Orangs have the eyes of an Airedale and one of them, near whom I stood for some time, looked into mine as if he were trying dumbly to tell me that his heart was slowly breaking.

"There were two or three mothers with infants of tender age. In only one instance was the father allowed to share the same cage. The maternal care shown by these females was very touching, and it was difficult to see where their conduct differed from that of a human mother with a little baby. One of them showed the same sensitiveness to prying eyes that a woman might have evinced in the same circumstances. When about to give nourishment to her infant she turned away to the wall of her cage and drew up the loose hay over her back so as to interpose a curtain between her and the staring people. The motion of her arm, as she drew the screen of grass

over her head, was exactly like that of an Indian woman drawing her *sari* over her head.

"The decency and dejected resignation of these unhappy captives filled one with pity for their fate, and made one ask whether the mere satisfaction of the gaping curiosity of a paying public is sufficient justification for the infliction of so much mental suffering on creatures who are so nearly allied to the primitive races of man. One is tempted to ask whether the Dutch authorities in the Far East are going to continue to permit the wholesale *razzias* that are now carried on in Sumatra among the nearest approach to human beings, not for the advancement of science—which might be some excuse—but merely, as in the case of the slave traders of old, to enable a few persons to make great pecuniary profits."

For the ventilation of cases needing public attention and remedy there is no greater platform in the world than that great and powerful newspaper, *The Times*, and my letter aroused widespread interest and provoked much correspondence in support of my protest. It was reproduced in many of the world's most influential papers, and I was especially gratified to find that it obtained the attention of Parliament in Holland, in the Asiatic territories of which this nefarious trade was chiefly centred.

It was a satisfaction to learn later that the government of the Dutch Indies had decided to prohibit the further capture and export of the great apes from Sumatra and other islands of the Far Eastern archipelago.

## POSTSCRIPT

1

TO-DAY I am sitting for the last time in my little cabana and realizing to my regret that I shall no more see the fishy friends that have given me so much entertainment and pleasure during the past twelve months.

The news of the war of late has been so good that the kind friends with whom I have been staying so long are packing up to go home. The house will soon be closed and I must find other quarters until I, in my turn, can go back by plane and ship to my own home in the sunny south of France. To my great relief I have news that, apart from some minor thefts during the occupations of the villa by Italians, no important damage has been done to the place.

A few hours ago I restored all my little fish to liberty. The shutter at the north end of the pool was opened and, one by one, they passed away to the blue sea beyond. My particular friend, Porky, when the door was opened, remained for one moment stationary in front of it as if unwilling to believe its eyes and that it was really the road to liberty. Then, doubtless, suddenly remembering the luscious green seaweeds and succulent little crabs from which it had so long been severed, it hastened through the opening. It is with regret that I have to record that the ungrateful creature, unmindful of the affection and care that I have lavished upon it during many months, never had the grace to give even a sketch of a parting salute before finally heading out to sea. My blessing, however, went with it.

I learnt with regret the other day that my old friend Moses had gone to his long home, wherever that may be. He had left my service some weeks ago and I was surprised to hear that he had the reputation of being one of the most potent of all the Obeahmen in these parts and that he had made quite a lot of money by his nefarious arts. He was much feared, as he was known to have made during his life more than one trip to Haiti, which is the head centre of witchcraft in the West Indies and where many of the masters of Voodoo are to be found. In some of my talks with him I had sometimes suspected that, in spite of his apparent candour when telling me about the practice of Obeah, he knew more about the darker sides of it than he would have confessed.

His belief in the infestation of the world by ghosts and other spirits was certainly genuine and he was particularly insistent on the malevolence of the denizens of the spirit world. He accounted for this malevolence by stating that human beings are naturally wicked and that their evil propensities are only kept in subjection during life by the heart and the brain. When these organs cease to function the spirit, freed from their control, gives full rein to its villainous instincts and does not scruple to injure those who were nearest and dearest to it in life. I could not help feeling that this was an interesting variant of the doctrine of Original Sin.

And now, as regards other things that I have talked about in this little book, I may remind my readers that most of them are recollections of experiences during a long life spent in many strange places and among

many backward peoples. I trust that, though some of them may have been considered rather gruesome, others may have given a few hours of amusement. I, at all events, have enjoyed writing them.



